Girlish forecastings.

TO-DAYS AND YESTERDAYS

BY

CARRIE ADELAIDE COOKE

AUTHOR OF "FROM JUNE TO JUNE"

Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build.
H. W. Longfellow.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

GIRLISH FORECASTINGS 7

CHAPTER II.

HOMEWARD 30

CHAPTER III.

SCHOOL-TEACHING 42

CHAPTER IV.

TWO PICTURES 68

CHAPTER V.

THE QUIET CHAMBER 87

CHAPTER VI.

LONGINGS 104

CHAPTER VII.

TOGETHER AGAIN 115

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ANNIVERSARY 138

CHAPTER IX.

WHEAT, OR TARES? 152

CHAPTER X.

I WILL NOT 170

CHAPTER XI.

HOPES AND FEARS 188

CHAPTER XII.

AT LAST 199

CHAPTER XIII.

GOING TO BATTLE 214

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARTING 222

CHAPTER XV.

COMING INTO THE CHURCH 234

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT THE FLOWERS SAID 240

CHAPTER XVII.

HELPED 253

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WINTER 267

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BEAUTIFUL FACE 286

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROPHECY DEFEATED 292

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REUNION 304

CHAPTER XXII.

LAST GLIMPSES 320

TO-DAYS AND YESTERDAYS.

CHAPTER I.

GIRLISH FORECASTINGS.

YES, Louise, let's go up into Margaret's room. It is the coziest one of all, and we want to enjoy ourselves this last evening. The very last, Bertie child!—can you realize it —that we shall not see the sun set behind dear old Merrivale hills again? Just look out now, and make the most of it!"

The last strong rays stole into the room, holding its occupants in a transient flood of radiance. Bertie Arnold and Louise Carroll, arm in arm, stood looking out, taking in, with wistful earnestness, every detail of the quiet, familiar picture — the summer fields, with their

waving corn, the fruit-laden orchards, the murmuring brook, that seemed, to-night, to be bluer and clearer than ever, and beyond these, the slow-rising hills that reached at last to grim old Mt. Ascutney.

Bertie's looking ended in a sigh. "Let's go up-stairs," she said; and her voice had a very quiet sound, as if some quick, strong feeling might have trembled through it, but for the strong will that repressed it.

Louise was twining one of her friend's golden curls around her fingers. Her regrets came to the surface. She didn't comprehend the unuttered pain that made Bertie's blue eyes, for the moment, dreamy and shadowed.

"Yes, I'm ready; only — do you suppose Miss Precision has finished her packing? She would look us quite out of the room if we intruded during that ordeal."

The merry good humor of her voice showed the words to be kindly and half-jesting.

"Yes, she is at leisure. I know she wants

to see us." Then with a little impatient shrug of her shoulders, "Why, what a stupid I am to-night! She *asked* us to come, when I was up there a while ago. What made me forget to tell you that, I wonder."

"I guess you *looked* your thoughts all away just now. Well, then, we'll go, and, if she is in the mood, have one more nice, gay evening in Margaret's room. Bertie, I'm glad walls can't speak. I wouldn't want a lot of 'new girls' to get any echoes of all our treasured talks."

Bertie didn't reply. She was brushing her hair at the little mirror, and just then seemed intent upon drawing a blue ribbon daintily through its rippling waves.

"Primping, are you? 'Prettifying,' as Gracie says. Well, I need it, too." She whisked off her quiet net and velvet. "Seeing as Margaret has never beheld us, it will pay to fix up, though my beauty is of a positive order, and doesn't need any help.

"Look here, Bertie, quick! There! I've got just the right focus of light on my nose. Can't you read 'Excelsior' on it?"

She shook her head with a defiant little laugh. Louise's nose was a constant trial to her, and her frequent allusions to the unfortunate feature made it almost impossible for the girls to forget what otherwise they would hardly have thought of — that it was slightly retroussé; indeed, inclined to be a pug nose. She, however, enjoyed the monopoly of abusing it. If any one else ventured to allude to the offending member, Louise's tone changed. "Poor nose!" she would apostrophize; "I'll stand up for you since you, stand up so bravely for yourself." And the critic — whoever she might be — generally changed the subject at the first of Louise's seemingly random thrusts at herself.

To-night, the same light that revealed the figurative "Excelsior," showed, too, pink dimpled cheeks, smiling mouth — not in the least like a "rose-bud," but very sweet withal — a low white

forehead, shaded by thick brown hair, and lighting up her face with changeful brilliancy, a pair of clear brown eyes that emphasized and strengthened their owner's right to be considered one of the belles of the school.

As she finished her slight preparations and turned toward Bertie, she presented a strong contrast to the face opposite.

Looking at Bertie Arnold carelessly, you might have pronounced her sweet, but childish; a comprehending scrutiny would make you change the verdict. I always thought of her quiet face and earnest nature as *intense*.

These two girls were room-mates — "chums," "inseparables" — at the boarding-school of Merrivale. Coming there at the same time — four years before my story opens — they had maintained a close friendship ever since. Their class had just graduated two days before this time, and they were no longer "school-girls."

"What can they do without us?" Louise would exclaim as she met one and another

of their number wandering disconsolately through the half-dismantled rooms. "We've been the pillars of this institution for so long, that it will totter to its very foundation. I'm glad enough to be emancipated, but oh! I pity the few who remain."

In spite of which merry talk, a few tears would fall sometimes upon her books and papers, as she packed them in her trunk.

The two girls locked their doors and went up the winding staircase to Margaret's "sanctum," as they called it. It was a flight above them, and by so much the more valuable for sight-seeing. "Point Lookout," Louise called the dormer window that gave them so many varying pictures, and helped them to forget all the weary stair-climbing by which they had reached it.

Long before this, when Margaret Carrington, a shy, proud girl, suffering from an acute attack of home-sickness during her first week at school, sat down in this same little

room to have a "good cry" — which she had fought against for days — a bright, merry face had peeped in at the door, and a queer little rippling voice said: "May I come in?"

"Certainly," rather curtly.

"You see I was somewhat afraid to try to call, since you are so aristocratic. You wouldn't stay down below, where there were plenty of vacant rooms, but must come up here among the clouds! I don't like it, but I think I like *you*. So I've ventured upon the ascent, both literal and figurative" — with an odd little bow.

"I think I don't recall your name," Margaret said, rather chillingly.

"I? Oh! I'm Louise Carroll. Not *Miss*, please remember. And you are Margaret Carrington. Now guess how I found it out! It was awfully rude, I know, but I got your book this morning in chapel, and read the name while you were listening to Professor Lindsay's lecture, and looking, oh, so sober!"

Margaret smiled, quite forgetting that this strange girl had interrupted her crying.

"I want to tell you as a friend, Margaret, not to begin in this way. It's an obsolete custom, this listening to his lectures. They're like the laws of the Medes and Persians, which haven't varied any since the memory of the oldest inhabitant."

"Which, by the way, *I* am not," was the answer.

"I know. But it looks so unsophisticated to pay attention; as if you expected to hear anything new. Prithee, don't do it!"

"I think I just — shall."

They both laughed. It was diamond cut diamond, evidently.

Louise's jesting covered, in reality, kind designs. She had noticed the pale, unquiet face, and knew by the sad eyes and tightly-closed lips that the new-comer was unhappy, and so sought her acquaintance in her own peculiar fashion, and helped to make her feel at home among them.

Memories of those "first days" had been in Margaret's mind to-night, and it was with a softened expression she turned towards the girls as they paused at the half-open door. Her voice was unwontedly gentle as she greeted them.

"Come in, dear ones, both. I've been waiting for you. Just now I had got to dreaming a little." She laughed a low, pleasant laugh, as she spoke.

Glancing at her, we see a tall, somewhat stately girl, womanly, and more mature in appearance than the others. Just now one hand rested caressingly upon Bertie's shoulder; the other, in a restless, unconscious fashion of her own, was toying with the tiny cross attached to her watch-chain. Scarcely pretty, *certainly* not handsome, was Margaret Carrington, yet possessed of a rarely attractive countenance.

Looking into her earnest black eyes, and noticing the broad, intellectual forehead, one would hardly care that her face lacked a little

in bloom and animation, or that the dignity of her manners verged upon stiffness.

Oddly enough, this tall girl, who seemed like an elder sister to her youthful-looking companions, was, in reality, the youngest of the trio. Bertie was just two weeks beyond her eighteenth birthday, Louise but six weeks younger, while stately Margaret must wait the Christmas-tide before she could call herself eighteen.

They nestled down together upon the big lounge, hands clasped, and faces leaning close, loving each other consciously more on this good-by evening than ever before.

Louise spoke first, as usual: "Barter for hard cash, *ma belle?* Just a single penny for your thoughts."

"Which of us?" from Bertie.

"Not you. I should descend to fractional currency with you; and then, I'm sure of yours if I wait a while, anyway."

Bertie tried to frown.

"Don't, darling. It's all my nonsense, you

know. But Margaret is looking such unutterable meanings straight at that unwieldy old trunk of hers! It's too bad, for it never will appreciate them."

Margaret started, and laughed a little, half nervously.

"Unutterable! That's just it, Louise. I couldn't put them into words if I would, and —"

"Wouldn't if you could? Then you *must*. I always find the imperative mood works best with you."

Margaret thought a moment, and then spoke abruptly:

"You see, girls, we are done here at school. Never shall belong here again."

"Well, aren't you glad of it?"

"Yes, I'm glad, and sorry. I suppose there is no pleasure without its twinge of regret. Certainly I find none."

"Upon my word, Bertie, she is going to talk to us about 'wasted opportunities' and 'misspent hours.' I see it in her face."

"Indeed, no, girls. If there have been such, I am not going to bring them up to-night. I guess, after all, we have done as well as most girls. I'm not thinking about anything of that sort. But this pleasant, care-free life of ours, this drifting along together, ends to-morrow. I don't know about the rest of you, but the thought holds a heartache for *me*."

A tear fell upon the hand that was holding Bertie's.

"I know it, Margaret, dear;" Louise spoke unsteadily. "But I always try not to think much of painful things. We have been very happy through these school years together, now we must be happy under different circumstances; true to each other, and sure to meet occasionally, if we really wish to."

"I like your cheerful philosophy, Louise. But somehow it just touches the surface with me to-night. The shadowy sadness and pain I feel are beyond it.

Bertie spoke then, dreamily.

"It's such a great hurrying world. We chanced to come here together; now we go so far asunder! Perhaps never again in all our lives can we reunite the cords of interest and familiar friendship that we must sunder to-morrow." She paused a moment. It was not quite easy to say what came next. "If we never do, dear friends — if never on earth I should see your faces again, I should still thank God for the four happy years he has given me with you."

The words meant something, coming from Bertie. An only child, and motherless, she clung with strong tenderness to the friends who suited her sensitive, fastidious nature. Only a few — in a larger, broader sense she loved the world generally; but very few reached the innermost.

Louise answered after a little silence. "It's no use. I've tried and tried to avert the crisis, but 'tis sure to come. Now, if you have me here weeping like a languishing Niobe, you must blame yourselves. I didn't want to cry."

She sobbed in good earnest for a moment. "It's downright mean"—in smothered tones from beneath her handkerchief—"when we wanted to have such a nice time to-night."

"Well, we will yet. This just happened. Cheer up, and we'll talk sensibly. I'll tell your fortunes as we used to years ago," said Bertie.

That roused Louise from her despondency.

"Let me be sibyl. I'm just in the mood. And then Margaret may tell mine."

It was an old, gossipy game that had amused them often with its varying disclosures. Perhaps all three felt a little more interest in it than usual to-night, but, nevertheless, it was simply a diversion.

Louise opened her book, let Margaret choose her lines, and from them improvised the mystic revelations.

"Going a journey, certainly," with a grave air of knowledge that made them laugh merrily, looking at the newly-packed trunk. "The oracles are right thus far."

"How *could* she have divined it?" whispered Bertie.

"A long journey, I should judge, and toward the south. It will bring you much good luck. I foresee two or three adventures on the way. Pay particular heed to them, as they may change your destiny. For a year you will remain in the place whither you are now going. Then your path turns in another direction. But I think you are to go *alone*. I don't see any one beside you. It doesn't seem a very pleasant way, and you keep putting your hands up before your eyes as if you couldn't see clearly. By and by you get out into the light again. Now I see some one else. He's tall, and dark, and handsome. He only looks at you, but — why! he goes right away again. You don't walk quite as firmly for a little while. Then you come to a place where you find very many books, and your fingers seem always ink-stained. You get a few wrinkles, and crows'-feet even, I notice, and

acquire a habit of stooping. But the world seems just to have found out the fact of your existence. And when you are making moan a little to yourself for your vanished youth, and your approaching thirtieth birthday, others will speak of Margaret Carrington, the gifted authoress. So goes the world, fair maiden!"

"*Is* that all? And are your words gratuitous? So I am to belong to the book-making craft. Louise, do go on and tell Bertie's fortune while you are so happily inspired."

"It's growing too dark to read anything. Let hers be a twilight fancy. I see this little white face, ever gentle, often smiling, in a stately home, lighting it up with a radiance it has sadly missed of late. I hear this sweet voice making music through the lofty rooms. I see a father's care-worn face grow young again from watching her. I see all around her books, flowers, pictures — all the bright and pleasant things of life thronging her pathway; lovers and friends in plenty. But she wears

the same kindly smile for all. At last, a long time from now I see her. I grieve to say she seems always in this last picture to wear a calico apron, cutting slices of bread and butter for charity children that surround her. Looking over her shoulder, I see what she called the 'study door' standing ajar, and I hear a ragged urchin asking if 'the minister is ter hum.' From which circumstances I infer that all her gifts and graces have gone to adorn a country parsonage."

"What a destiny!" Bertie clapped her hands gleefully. "Quick, Maggie! let's retaliate. I see a cross, gouty old gentleman sitting in an arm-chair, and a timid woman who bears a faint resemblance to Louise Carrol attending to his wants. And I hear him mutter, as she leaves the room, 'Married me for my money, did you? Not a dime of it shall you have.' That's my picture."

Margaret smiled as she said: "And mine is scarcely better. The most important figure in

the foreground is an enormous black-and-white cat, who seems to be playing with a ball of yarn on the carpet — *floor* I mean; it's only washed and sanded — in the sunshine. There is a strong odor of green tea, and the prim spinster who sits sipping it, her knitting-work for the moment fallen into her lap, would tell you upon inquiry that her name is 'Lou-i-sy Carrol. Age forty-five. I opened my eyes, and *that's* what I saw — eh, Louise?"

"I cry quits."

"We must all feel joyous at our prospects. Certainly every one gets her ambition gratified. Maggie gets fame, you, Louise, money — less than a dime — and I the privilege of giving bread and butter to ragged children. What more could we ask? Say, girls, can't we remember these fortunes till our class reunion? That will be three years from to-morrow. We shall have lived out some of our destiny before then, and can compare facts and fancies."

"No fear but that Bertie will remember, especially if Allan Grantley studies for the ministry."

A shade of haughtiness crept into Bertie's manner. Then she spoke, half lingeringly:

"In three years, Margaret, I shall be twenty-one — changed a good deal, probably, from the girl of to-day."

"You'll keep the same warm heart for us, though, won't you, childie? Don't let that change."

"No, I know I can promise that. But now the thought of this reunion, and the meeting all our school friends again, even at so distant a date, seems of great importance to us. Will it then, I wonder? You heard cousin Mabel say that less than one-half of her class met at Ortenville, and they only waited *two* years."

"If any don't want to come, we can do just as well without them. If any want to come, but cannot, we will love and remember just the same."

"Yes," Louise made answer directly. "And one thing you have forgotten, Margaret. If any of us — you, or I, or Bertie here, just as likely as any of the others — should go away from it all before then, would the reunion be any the less tenderly complete because we looked down upon it from our new, brighter home?"

"I think not."

"Nor I;" from both the listeners.

Bertie followed out the thought. "St. Paul speaks of love that cannot be lost. That is *heavenly* love. Now I think the stronger our human loves become, the nearer they come to this ideal. I wish we were so firmly friends as never to forget or lose the friendship."

"I think I see what you mean, Bertie," said Margaret. "'Life nor death.' Darling, if *life* cannot separate us I am sure that death is neither so cruel nor so powerful as to do it. If you were in this world, and I in another, I would love you still. Were you to go first, I should never fancy you had forgotten."

"Oh! I have faith enough for that. It's the *living* true in our friendships that we must think of."

Thus their talk drifted into solemn realities. The underlying consciousness that it was the *last* in that dear old room, pervaded each heart.

Often and often had those walls echoed to their joyous laughter and merry chat. To-night they would leave, as their last legacy to the place and its associations, flashes of their deepest feelings.

They had been walking only in pleasant paths. To neither of them had come, during all that school-time, any *shaded* blessings. The angels of sorrow had not stirred either heart to its depths; the surface of their lives had been sunlighted and breeze-rippled. But glimpses of what *might be* came to each of them in this tender twilight hour.

They were to say good-by to some of the dearest friends life had given them, and this knowledge affected each powerfully. Instinct-

ively, Bertie's thoughts clothed themselves in Bible language. Just as naturally Margaret trusted more in death than life. Yet to neither of them had come the heavenly illumining which would make the uncertain way their feet were to walk, bright beyond doubt or fearing.

Neither of the three whose lives during a few of the slow-coming years we are to follow, had sought and found the Saviour's guiding, over-shadowing love. Such as they were, generous in impulse, true-hearted, and loving, we find them. Their development toward good or evil, rests with the coming years.

Quietly talking, the darkness had gathered around them unnoticed, until their faces were hidden from each other. Bertie's tender voice sounded sweeter than ever to her listeners as she talked of her home — the home where no mother's nor sister's voice would brighten her days. It was but natural she should think of the difference between her home and the others'.

"But papa," she said brightly, "will be just happy to have even poor little me at home. And you girls, particularly Louise, must come to me by winter. Maggie will find it hard to get away from her friends, I suppose, but Lu, you'll find me as pleasant discipline as a district school, I rather think."

"That's your way of putting it. You *know* whether I shall want to come or not."

Margaret commenced speaking, but was interrupted by the clock's striking ten. The coach was to leave early in the morning, and they knew it was time to be asleep.

"Not now," as Louise urged her to go on. "I'll say it all to-morrow. Now good-night!" kissing each affectionately; "don't talk any more, but go right to sleep, both of you."

CHAPTER II.

HOMEWARD.

GOOD-BY, Mattie, Ella, Susie! Remember to write often, girls! Charlie, I shall appreciate your *sweet* farewell present," Louise said, laughingly, as she held up a package suspiciously fragrant of caramels and cocoa. "Don't miss us too much, any of you."

"Girls, here's the coach," came warningly, in Mrs. Howard's pleasant tones from her station by the gate.

She looked affectionately into the faces that turned to kiss her good-by — the young faces that had flashed their fresh brightness into her more quiet way during their happy school years. She would miss them from heart as well as home.

Margaret drew down her veil, and sprang hastily into the coach. She had taken her real farewell an hour before, in a long talk with Mrs. Howard, full of grateful thanks on the one hand, and tender counsels and good wishes on the other. Now, she had no fancy for a scene, and hastened to hide the tears which she knew would come.

"Don't forget us, quite, 'mother'! But then, I know you will. Every bird sings in his season. We've had ours. Now you'll fill up the house with new warblers.'

"None that will sing more to my liking"— the good woman was looking hastily for her handkerchief. "You've been good girls, all of you. Remember the reunion, Bertie dear." She stooped and kissed her again. "There! Mr. Rawley looks impatient. Good-by all!"

The coach started, the driver smiling a little satirically, it may be, as he drove off. He had witnessed a great many similar leave-takings, and imagined that he knew just

about what they were worth. He thought of his passengers as so many students who liked school well enough, but home and gayety more.

"It'll wear off fast enough," he muttered to himself, as he caught sight of the quick-coming tears.

Wise man! Just as wise as we, any of us, are when we think to measure accurately another's experience.

We might see tears or smiles, as it should chance, but the deep feelings whence they sprang, the countless influences that must work henceforth and always in those young hearts, the fruits both of good and evil of the school-life just closed, are beyond our ken. As in a picture you can give to the beholder but a single gleam as the translation of some vision, but the thought which suggested it, the many brooding fancies that enriched it as you saw it in your tender dreamings, can never be transcribed upon the canvas.

In the changeful kaleidoscopic vision of our life, we can show to each other only fragmentary glimpses that come to the surface for their seeing. The colors may seem dingy, the sketching oft at fault, but the eyes that saw the olden beauty of the lilies, the tender comprehending gaze that read the memorial meaning in the alabaster box from which Mary, unknowing, anointed Him unto his burial, will surely find, in all these pictures, not the dim, imperfect failures they seem, but what our best wishes, our truest prayers desired them to be.

As Bertie and Louise looked from the carriage window down the hill toward the old Academy, there came to each a quick, flashing memory of the joys they had known there; a tender consciousness of what had been given them day after day in that quiet, oft-satirized, yet always loved Merrivale that they were leaving.

The sun shone full upon the brick walls and the guardian trees that for so many years had rustled their leafy branches against the windows.

How many summers had they kept their silent watch! How many classes had come and gone, aye, how many bright faces of those who in years agone had spent their happy seasons here were silent underneath the valley sods!

Yet the old brick building and whispering trees remained the same. The road wound round toward the south. The hills shut out that last picture, and their way lay *onward*. The moment and its lesson had come and gone, but its memory would remain with both.

Margaret raised her veil, and seemed prepared to talk. Gracie Rogers closed her book, and, yawning a little, said merrily: "Are you going to be mute all the way, good people? I, for one, want a little fun."

"Ditto," from Harold Lawton.

Louise drew her face into a queer little smile.

"Waiting for me? I'm a *sine qua non* when you want to be silly. Don't deny it! Don't I know you are all right among yourselves for good common-sense, but when it comes to

foolishness, why, there's nobody like 'Louise.'"

"*You* said that, Miss Carrol," in Allan Grantley's laughing tones. "*We* never should have ventured. But we won't dispute your veracity."

"*Et ter Brute!*" She sighed, in comic despair.

Margaret spoke a little abruptly, for the first time since they started.

"Who was it that said the use of language was to conceal one's thoughts? A wise man, or woman, I think. You're keeping up this merry talk to disguise what you are really thinking."

"The way we go through the world, Miss Carrington," answered young Grantley. "It's all well enough, if only there are no evil thoughts to conceal."

"*Perhaps so!*"

"She doesn't think that you're right. Maggie believes that we should make mirrors of our words, and let everybody see what we are

thinking. Mercy! I wouldn't want to know what you are all thinking about — myself, for instance. Where would be the good?"

"But what if we were mentally admiring you?"

"Then I'd be vain. And a country schoolmistress must keep humble. I don't want to rise above my station."

"Then that is your destiny, Miss Louise?" Allan asked with quiet interest.

"Yes. Didn't you know it? Haven't you noticed my steadily increasing dignity of manner ever since the last term began? I've been fitting myself for my vocation."

"Ah, yes; I understand. If, from any defect of vision, I have failed to perceive it, please forgive me."

"'None so blind as those —'"

Just here Bertie laughed, looking out of the open window by which she sat. Nothing very remarkable about that you would think. Yet it attracted everybody's attention to herself,

and caused Louise to leave her sentence unfinished.

It was a spontaneous, merry little laugh, and the face she turned toward them, with an eager "Oh, look!" seemed, with its comical smile fresh upon the tear-stains, like a rain-washed flower on which the sun was shining.

"What is it?" questioned Gracie.

"A travelling menagerie, I guess," laughing again.

Right beside them in the road, keeping just abreast and ludicrously imitating the driver, was a little boy, magnificent in a mimic four-wheeled cart drawn by a remarkably meek-looking donkey. For passengers, he had a sleepy-appearing dog, three little kittens snugly cuddled up in an old cap in the corner, and a couple of hens who avenged themselves for the insult of being tied and put in a basket, by clucking and squalling vociferously.

The juvenile owner of this singular array was whistling with an air of sturdy independ-

ence, and the scrutiny he received from the occupants of the rival stage-coach seemed in no degree to diminish his comfortable assurance.

"Do you suppose there's any history appended to *that*," questioned Louise. "Let's talk to him a little when we stop at the corner."

Five minutes later they reached the country tavern, not ambitious enough to claim for itself the title of hotel, where the driver changed horses and waited for the mail. Thus they had half an hour at their disposal.

The young "knight of the nondescripts," as Louise denominated him, drove up in a leisurely manner a few moments after they had entered the house, and proceeded to give his patient donkey oats and water, with praiseworthy attention to his work and apparent unconsciousness of their being in sight.

The girls stood looking at him through the open window as he busied himself in this fashion.

"Allan!" Bertie spoke to him in an aside. "Can't you go out and 'make friends' with him? The little fellow has a nice face. I'd like to know something about him."

A moment later Allan Grantley was strolling through the yard in the vicinity of the boy, but not near enough to seem intrusive. He was careful, even in small things, to conform to the rules of good-breeding and kindliness, and the quiet self-reliance of the boy's manner made him hesitate about speaking to him as to most children. An opportunity presented itself, however. It appeared that something about the harness had given way, and the boy looked with some perplexity at the ill he didn't quite know how to remedy.

"Can't I help you?"

Little Henry Davis — as he afterward gave his name — looked up at the young man eagerly.

"I don't quite see how I'm to get home with my load unless this can be fixed. And

mother will worry so if I'm late," he added in a disturbed tone, trying to fasten a refractory buckle as he spoke.

Allan soon assured himself that ten minutes' work would set all right, and, despatching the little fellow to the house for the proper implements, fell to work most energetically.

Henry's eyes sparkled as he watched the young man deftly splicing the worn ends of leather, and tying them securely with a rope found in the basket with the ill-used hens.

In thanking Allan, he spoke again of "mother's being worried," which led to a slight explanation of his home-life. And Allan often thought, in later days, of the sturdy courage of this little fellow, who, like him of old, "was the only son of his mother, and she a widow."

It was a simple story enough. Poverty, sickness, and unpaid bills that must be met by the patient labor of this scarcely more than child.

A simple story, and not wholly a sad one, when one could comprehend the promised fruitage in the boy's character, whose blossoms were so good to look upon, even now.

When Allan repeated the brief history to Bertie, her only answer was a quiet smile and word of thanks. She felt sure of much that he did not tell her; of words of sympathy and encouragement that had sent the boy on his way with new faith in himself and hope for the future. So easily can helping hand and kindly word comfort and strengthen!

The remainder of their journey passed pleasantly, but uneventfully, as the succeeding days also passed, until we see them again in their several homes.

CHAPTER III.

SCHOOL-TEACHING.

LOUISE CARROL, after a pleasant rest at home, began casting about in her mind concerning the coming winter.

This young girl who wore such a smiling face through experiences that saddened others, had now from her friends the reputation of being a little flighty.

Talented and industrious certainly. Every one conceded that. But many, who knew her superficially, felt that she didn't take life enough in earnest. That was the impression she made upon strangers. Those who understood her best, the parents and sisters who were familiar with all her history, knew to the contrary.

It had been no play with her, this four years

of school-life at Merrivale. At times it had seemed almost impossible — so little money came to them from her father's business, and so numerous the home demands upon it — for her to remain there during the course. Especially had this been the case during the second year. A long, sympathizing letter from her mother had conveyed the unwelcome tidings that she might have to give up her school plans.

It did not make our happy-hearted girl discouraged. It only set her thinking. She had a tolerably good musical education, and now hoped by means of this to complete her school-course.

"I can't do much," she said half doubtfully to Bertie, "but I think I am thorough in what I do know about music, and I could succeed, perhaps, with beginners. I mean to speak to Mr. Lawrence about it. He can help me to get scholars."

Bertie always had the utmost faith in Louise's ability to do what she chose, and her hearty encouragement hastened the experiment. Mr.

Lawrence gladly assisted in procuring scholars, and Louise soon found herself assured of sufficient means to complete that year, at least. Afterward, she was always ready to hear classes when needed, and in many ways added to her school fund.

So, during these last years she had bravely and perseveringly helped herself, at what cost of pleasant leisure and oft-time needed rest school-girls can understand.

Few of the school save her intimate friends comprehended the need of such effort, or realized how much care it gave her. And in spite of it, and her almost unfailingly class-rank, she always seemed the blithest of them all.

Now that she was out of school, she found herself really eager to try, in her turn, to teach others. Naturally fond of books, and always interested in the studies and sports of children, the idea of taking charge of a school seemed full of fascination. Just a

small school, at first. By and by, when she was older, and could rely on experience as well as education, she will look for something higher; but she didn't care for a pretentious beginning.

Her home was upon the eastern shore of Massachusetts. Bertie lived in the western part of the same State, and they often laughed about it, calling themselves boundary marks, and wishing they had both been located to the eastward; for Bertie was enthusiastic about the ocean, and every mile that could bring her nearer it she would have counted a gain.

"But Massachusetts is only a little State after all," Louise wrote to Bertie in September. "I shall come to you, you may be sure, when I weary of my discipline."

She obtained a school without much difficulty. The knowledge of her fine education impressed the sturdy farmer who occupied the position of prudential committee in the dis-

trict where she made applications. He fancied it something to be proud of that he had discussed Miss Carrol's good qualities, and secured her for his children.

Whether she was more glad or sorry at her ready acceptance, the young girl could scarcely have told. She rather wanted to teach in the country, but it did seem a little more quiet than she had expected.

She had hired a horse and driven out to Longley one pleasant day, through a perfect flush of autumnal brightness. The road was unfamiliar to her, and in all the beauty of the crimsoning trees and hazy sky, she had scarcely noticed how few the houses were, and what an air of utter quiet pervaded the place.

But when she alighted at the door of Mr. Merton's house, and glanced about her, she felt a queer sense of loneliness. She almost hesitated to go on with what she had undertaken. However, this was no time for timid

shrinking, and she walked into the house with a quiet air of determination.

The business completed, she took her homeward way, a little oblivious of amber clouds and changeful tintings. She was thinking, with an odd mixture of feeling that sometimes brought a merry smile, and anon drew a momentary line across her forehead, of farmer Merton's words: "We think it a very *forrud* school. Calkerlate there ain't many round here that can beat it."

He had also said, in answer to her question about a boarding-place, that there wouldn't be any particular one. "Folks seem to be anxious to have the schoolmarm board round this term. And 'twill be the best way. It'll save money, and lengthen out your school."

Louise didn't venture any remonstrance; but the idea of changing her abode so often among those strange, probably uncultivated people, was not very charming to her.

"That's the only unpleasant thing about it,

mother," she said, at the close of a long talk that evening. "I dread going into so many families."

"But, Lu," said her younger sister Bessie, "I expect you'll be happy at least once a week; when it comes time for you to leave. You'll keep hoping the next place will be a little better."

"Yes, daughter. A week isn't such a very long time. Only so many days. You can keep counting them less and less, and doubtless in many of the families you will be really happy." She repressed a sigh. It did seem hard to her tender heart that her child must go away so soon to make her way by such a wearily slow path to self-support and independence. But she said not a word to discourage her. She knew full well that "good cheer is half the battle."

"Margaret said: 'Here our ways separate,' that day I came home," Louise thought to herself in the quiet of her own room that night. "Her words were prophetic. There must be a wide

contrast between the life she will lead this winter and mine. Oh, it must be so good to be rich!" That she could say just to herself. She never hinted such thoughts to others. We all grumble a little sometimes to ourselves, when we would be tempted to deny it to others, even our best friends.

November came. Thanksgiving Day came and went, and her school was to commence on the Monday following that time-honored festival. This was one of the traditional customs most strictly observed in the neighborhood. Had this holiday been appointed weeks later, they would have waited school with unwavering patience.

On that eventful Monday morning Louise was carried to her first boarding-place at Captain Smith's. They wanted to begin as grandly as possible, so she was first introduced into the leading family of the place. Her trunk was carried to the room which was to be hers during her brief sojourn among them, while she was detained below stairs a few moments for a formal

presentation to Mrs. Smith and her two daughters, Estella and Matilda.

Escaping from their voluble efforts to make her "feel at home" as quickly as possible, she sought her room to spend a few moments in collecting her wayward thoughts for the coming ordeal. A little before nine o'clock farmer Merton appeared to accompany her to her new scene of labor. She would willingly have dispensed with his services, but not venturing to say so, followed him half-reluctantly to the little brick schoolhouse, where she was to enjoy — or endure — her first experience in teaching.

Some of her bright fancies were rather rudely dashed that morning. In the first place, the remarks with which Mr. Merton saw fit to open school were almost too much for her risibles. She wondered whether the scholars were accustomed to such harangues. Then, too, she was much surprised at the appearance of the school. She had expected to find a class of bright-faced children to be petted and loved,

encouraged and praised. But at sight of the tall, womanly-looking girls, several of them evidently her seniors, and the "big boys" — were any of them voters? — who were looking at her so curiously, her courage began to fail. Could she control and instruct such singularly forward and mature youth?

When the august member of the committee vanished, she knew it was time for her duties to commence, and that she mustn't allow herself to feel disheartened. So, keeping face and voice as calm as she could, in spite of a little nervous tremor, she went through with the preliminary exercises. Names were taken, books examined, and the work of classification progressed as rapidly as, under the circumstances, it could. She studied all the new faces intently. Before noon she felt quite sure in her own mind who were to be her helpers and who her trials. The bright-eyed girl with curls so like Bertie's, she should love her a *little* the best, she felt quite sure, and the sparkling little brunette

beside her, who already began to show signs of mischief, could be governed by steady kindness, unless her face-reading was at fault.

One or two wee child-faces in the seats nearest her desk gave her a sudden wish to kiss their smiles and dimples, while others, stolid and unsmiling, impressed her with a half-defined feeling of dislike. The tall, fine-looking boy who answered all her inquiries so promptly and respectfully, would prove a good reliable friend among the scholars, she had no doubt. Another at the same desk, with heavy forehead, and bushy black hair, looked obstinate and sullen.

She felt rather glad than otherwise that there was such a difference in age. It would be more interesting. As a whole, she was well satisfied with her first day at school, and it was with a light heart that she started on her homeward walk.

Captain Smith's house being at quite a distance from school, she had taken a lunch instead of going there at noon. Very hungry, a little

excited, and more tired than she realized, she went down into the sitting-room, after having remained in her own room long enough to get thoroughly chilly.

She found the young ladies fully as cordial as was desirable; particularly free in asking questions and examining her hair and dress.

At six o'clock they were summoned to the dining-room. Hungry as she had been and plentiful as was the food before her, Louise could not eat.

Captain Smith seemed to feel it incumbent upon him to entertain the stranger, and such was his pompous assurance, that she was compelled to listen to, and answer his remarks, when they scarcely interested her enough to fix her attention. Mrs. Smith seemed a kindly, pleasant woman, but she never made a decided impression upon people. Between her husband's dignified self-importance, and her daughters' ideas of fine ladyhood, she found it necessary to spend her time in deeds rather than words.

She was the only one of the family toward whom Louise experienced a feeling of hearty liking and good will.

Our young teacher commenced her week fortified by numerous excellent theories in regard to it. Many of them she sadly learned could not stand the test of every-day use. Sometimes prompt recitations and correct deportment cheered and encouraged her. Again she was tried almost beyond endurance by signs of rebellion or positive disobedience.

When, on Friday, she took her leave of the Smith family, it was with the utmost resignation. They had been very kind to her. The girls evidently thought they had constituted themselves her especial friends for the winter, and they certainly had done so, if intimacy consists in limitless borrowing and constant imitation. But she had found little congeniality there. It was not an atmosphere in which she could breathe freely, and she was very glad to make a new venture the next week,

although Matilda very freely commiserated her upon the painful prospect.

"I don't know what you will do, Louise,"—they had unhesitatingly adopted her christian name—"at widow Hervey's. They are very *common* people."

"You are always sure of a welcome here, should you become discontented elsewhere," added the captain.

Louise thanked him very properly.

"But 'twas fortunate he didn't know what I was thinking at the same time," she said to Bessie that night, after having reached home for her two days' rest.

She was making them all laugh at her comical recitals. She didn't tell any of her *real* discouragements for her mother to worry about a whole week before she could be at home again. So it was only the funny things, the queer happenings, that came to the surface.

"Well, papa, I'm at home again, you see!"

as he came in from the store, a little tired, a little grave, she saw at a glance.

But the clouds cleared, and he smiled gladly at sight of her.

"It seems good to see you, my daughter. I wish"—he checked himself. "Are you contented?"

"Absolutely, just at present." Then more soberly, "Yes, papa. I'm going to like it ever so much."

"That's right." His face lightened perceptibly.

Louise felt repaid for any unselfish ignoring of trifling discomforts at sight of this relieved look. They had been anxious about her, but now their minds could be at rest.

Another week and another home-coming. If we listen to this evening's talk, we shall learn how she is prospering in her new work. We catch first a question from Bessie.

"And you tried to encourage him, didn't you?"

"Yes, and, Bessie, I found out by this experi-

ment that he felt perfectly satisfied with himself without any encouragement of mine. I had felt like this: that this John Hicks whom everybody called such a bad boy, only needed a little kindness and attention. He didn't begin to come to school till Tuesday, and then only brought a reading-book. He did behave terribly. I didn't know what to do with him, but I tried the kindness plan. None of the scholars seemed to pay any attention to him, and I imagined, you see, that he would be grateful for any notice from me. So at afternoon recess I began to talk to him. He didn't make very satisfactory replies about his studies, and I was so determined to win him to sociability that I thought I'd question him concerning out-door sports, thinking that might be more to his taste." She paused, biting her lip.

"And what then?"

"Why, it wasn't much better. I said, 'Do you like skating?' He grinned at me rather vacantly; as if he knew it was a hoax, but couldn't quite

see how. I repeated my question. 'You bet!' was the answer, rather unexpected, I confess. But I persevered till I found that he would speak only when he chose."

"It must have been provoking. If I'd been in your place —"

"You would have done very much as I did, little Miss Wisdom. It doesn't do to get provoked too often in school. But I was disappointed. Don't you think it was odd, papa?"

"Not at all. It's only in books that you find these rough, uncouth fellows so speedily transformed into gentlemen. In real life, my child, we must be content with gradual processes. Perhaps you may yet see gratifying improvement in your unpromising John; though just as possibly he may cause you trouble."

"O, Louise! What about the pretty girl you liked so much last week? Is she as nice as you expected?"

"Y-e-s, I like her. Perhaps there are others who will be as pleasant. Some faces that you

scarcely notice at first, are the very ones that grow upon your liking afterward. I like them all, though, and some of them I am really learning to love. I have been as contented as possible at Mrs. Hervey's. She is just like you, mother."

"And that means — everything good," said Mr. Carrol, with a tender smile on his careworn face.

After a minute's thought Louise said: "Teaching isn't quite what I expected."

"Better, or worse?"

"Both. In many ways it is full of pleasure, but the care and anxiety of it seem to follow me all the time. I must learn better about that."

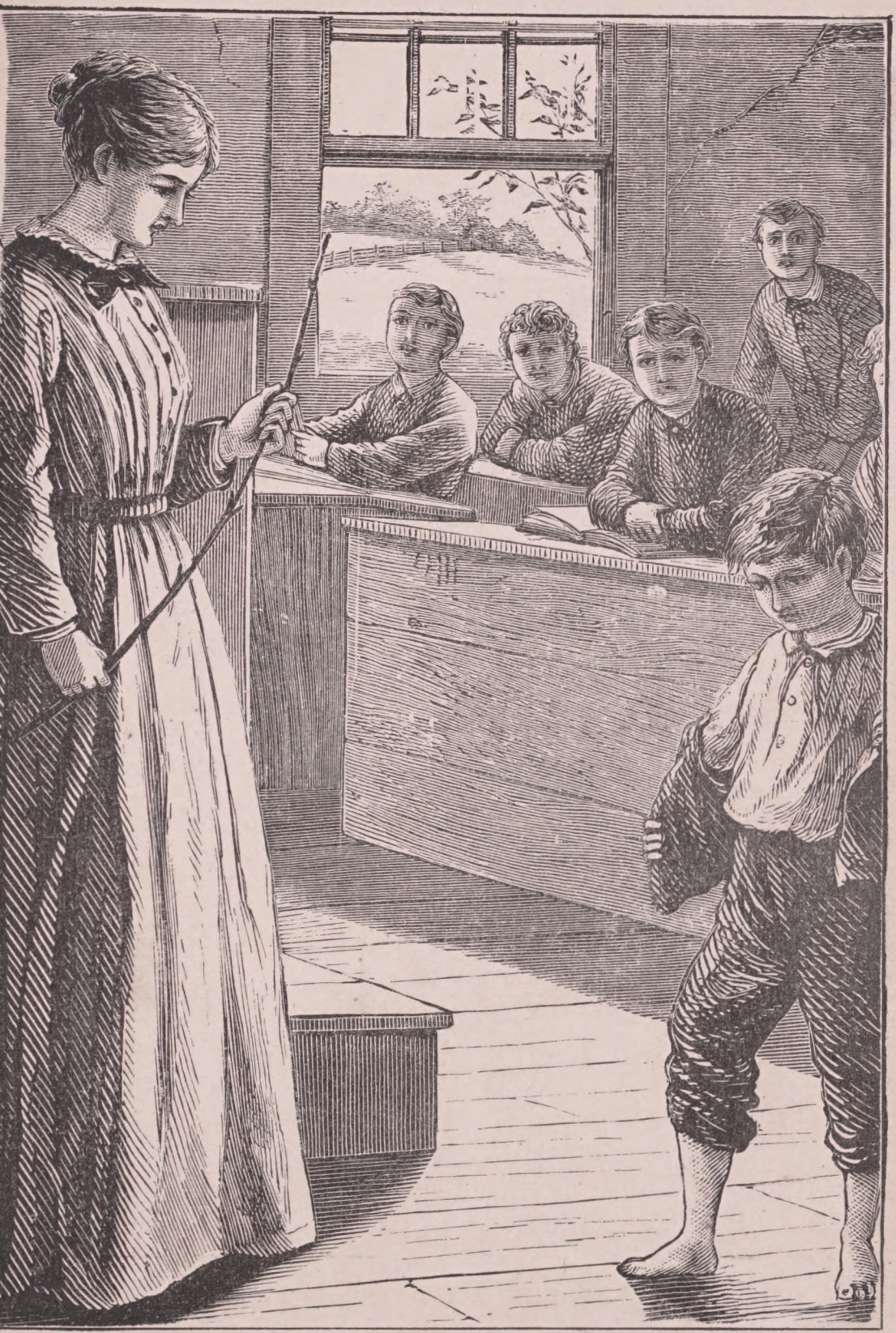
"Yes, my child. Your work is for school-hours. Beyond that time, you ought never to carry any of your perplexities. It will mar your happiness and never, I venture to assert, improve your school a whit."

The winter passed rapidly, with its alternate storms and sunshine. Within the low walls

of the schoolroom the young teacher was receiving daily lessons. A new expression crept gradually into her face. This strange contact with human souls, this feeling that, for a time, she had the opportunity to touch them with an influence that might leave a lasting impress upon their characters, gave dignity to her work, even while it almost frightened her.

It was not just what she had anticipated. Unexpected trials made some days dreary to experience, and gloomy to remember. But bright little gleams of affection, kindly words of appreciation, and marks of improvement, would often give her — what is, I think, one of the best pleasures in the world — a consciousness of having accomplished the good she aimed to do.

Her mirthfulness would break out occasionally, much to her own discomfiture. But it helped to win a very warm place for her in the hearts of the children.



Unexpected trials made some days dreary.

Many a long winter's evening when she was domiciled among people who must needs remain strangers, because their tastes and interests were so foreign to her own, was made happy by writing to her well-remembered schoolmates. Many and many a welcome letter came to her from those who were already cherishing those schooldays as a precious *past.* Sometimes it would come into Louise's mind — how real that time seemed to her! — and for a moment she would forget her new life, with its cares and pleasures, and be again by Bertie's side, strolling along the shaded hill-side paths, or in Margaret's room, listening to her earnest talk.

But the vision was fleeting. That was all gone now. Other merry girls filled their places. The little room had new occupants.

And this girl's path was onward. Her most earnest gaze must be, not toward any picture of memory, no matter how dear or how tender, but toward the future, and the noble,

honorable womanhood to which she might attain.

At last the term closed. Am I writing for any one who can comprehend Louise's feelings on that last night? Any girl who has striven just as earnestly and doubted her success just the same in that "first school," which is, in many respects, so different from what any later effort can be? For such, I venture to read briefly from her diary that evening's jottings:

"Done at last! Am I glad? I guess so; and yet the tears fall as I write it. Dear little dingy room, with your smoking stove-pipe, and rattling windows, your door that cannot latch, and ventilator that has admitted rain and snow upon my devoted head, I shall remember you tenderly!

"Sitting here alone to-night, now that the children have all gone — more quietly than their wont, and with good-bys a little tremulous — I remember only the best and happiest part of my winter. God bless them all! — the dear ones of my charge.

"The play is ended. The curtain is drawn. I shall not return here, because I want more advanced work. Still, I have been kept busy enough. I have tried to draw all these young lives close to my own.

"I think many of them have learned to love me.

"There have been hard places. Sometimes unpleasant personal friction. But that went with the day. What remains in my memory to-night is a succession of kindly deeds and loving words; winter flowers that have blossomed in our hearts, to wither, I trust, 'neath no cold blast of neglect or forgetfulness. I may not meet them again in the old familiar fashion, but, with a love that no after experience can awaken, just the same; I shall remember these — my first scholars.

"What I have done to help them has been heartily, earnestly done. Wherein I have failed — and there lies the painful shadow of my winter; the fear that in many things I

have failed — it has been from lack of knowledge, not lack of effort."

Many a day as Louise and Bessie sat at their sewing, was enlivened by school-memories. Bessie never wearied of them. She grew familiar with them all. John Hicks, who become only just passable in spite of Louise's persistent efforts, but who, nevertheless, drew his rough sleeve across his eyes when he said "good-by," and muttered something about her being a good woman, if ever there was one; the pretty girl with curls like Bertie's, who was rather conscious of being pretty and had tried the young teacher's patience sorely sometimes by her indolence and vanity; the sullen-faced "tall boy," whom she had found to be a manly, self-reliant scholar; the little children, one and all, who had made her heart very tender toward them — each came in for a share of remembrance.

There were pleasant things to tell of every one. Sometimes Louise's face would grow sad

and her voice tremble as she spoke of Richard Ferguson, the boy of graceful address and winning manners, who had been one of her earliest favorites.

"I was so much interested in him, Bessie! I can't seem to understand it yet, how he could have been so bad. He was always so kind to me all the weeks he came to school. And then to leave as he had to —"

The boy had been detected in stealing, and under circumstances that aggravated the offence. He had been sent to a reform school, and Louise not only missed him from her number, but had a vague sense of not quite understanding about the matter.

She had called to see him, but the boy seemed so utterly overcome by his trouble that she derived little satisfaction from his confused statements.

Of his guilt there was, unfortunately, small doubt. The explanation, if explanation there were, his friends must wait for till that in-

definite "sometime" when it might be given.

Louise was only at home for a short time. Her year's work was mapped out before her. Professor Lindsay had procured her an admirable position as lady teacher in an academy, and she could enjoy but a brief vacation. Bertie entreated her almost piteously for the promised visit.

"I am far from well," she wrote, "and, Louise, I have depended so much upon your coming as soon as your school closed. Do change your plans and come here for the summer. I don't know quite how to put it, you are such an independent darling. But I *do* want you, and you shall not lose anything by giving up this summer to my whims. *Do come!*"

Louise read this letter more than once.

"If I only could go," she said to herself one day as she sat ruffling her one silk dress with rather scant material. But I've nothing to wear. I know Bertie is dressy, now that she is in society. There!" — the rosy lips shut firmly —

"I won't go. I might as well begin to depend upon myself. I shouldn't be happy there, doing nothing and taking Mr. Arnold's money. I won't do such a thing, even for her. Dear little Bertie! I'm sorry she is sick!"

So she answered the letter, and Bertie never guessed from the calm, loving words, the little ripple of indecision and the final resolve that had caused Louise a heartache.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO PICTURES.

IT was a luxurious apartment, furnished with all appliances of ease and enjoyment. The heavy carpet, softening the sound of every footfall; the sweeping curtains which, closely drawn to-night, shut out all sight of the moon-lighted snow which lay thick and white, although it was late in March; the lounges, easy-chairs, pictures and statuary, all showed it to be the abode of wealth and refinement.

The gas lighted up every part of the room, bringing out the rich, warm colors of the draperies, and the vivid hues of the canvas. Just such a cozy nook as a person of taste and culture might choose whither to bring his

books, and the best part of his thinking, for an evening hour.

Books lay scattered about upon the tables. One, open, bore conspicuously upon the title-page the name of Voltaire. All of them, should you review their contents, would prove of a similar nature.

The room was utterly quiet, save for the ticking of the little French clock upon the mantel. Its occupant, sitting by the grate, his eyes shaded by his hand, had been for many minutes motionless.

Eight o'clock! The silvery chimes told the hour. The sheltering hand was withdrawn. The young man rose hastily, revealing to us the face and figure of Harold Lawton. Many months have passed since we last saw him, generous and good-humored, on that July day when he took leave of Merrivale. To-night his face hardly wore the same care-free look; one almost of weariness replaced it.

In the strong light, as he paced slowly up

and down the room, one could watch him closely. His is a pleasant, winning countenance, showing as yet few traces of the manly strength and firmness which later years may bring. Nor has it lost that look of unshrinking confidence and generous trust which lights up many a youthful brow, but too rarely outlasts the hard realities of the world.

His eyes, blue and sunny, had never, perhaps, looked with keen scrutiny into the deep mysteries of life. His forehead, over which the curling hair fell carelessly, was broad and white; not perplexed and drawn, as was Margaret's, sometimes, by mighty thoughts, or marked with the faint lines which Allan's intense living had already traced upon his.

Indeed, at school Harold had been the wonder and admiration of them all. The ready adaptation to circumstances, which characterized him, the merry carelessness which contrasted so with the earnest natures of many of his chosen friends among his class-

mates, had rendered him a general favorite.

"I wish I had your disposition," Margaret had said to him once during an autumn campaign of Latin poetry and senior essays. "You take everything so easily. Now I am too nervous to get any rest."

"You don't know, Miss Margaret. We always admire what *we* are not," had been his answer. "How much better I should get on in the world had I some of your firm persistence!"

"Yes!" Louise was leaning upon Margaret's arm, and joined in the conversation. "That is just the truth, Harold. I looked over toward you in class this morning, and it came into my mind how hard it would be for those smiling lips of yours ever to say 'no!'"

"I am rather acquiescent, I admit."

"Well, if I were a phrenologist, I should tell you to cultivate your organ of firmness. Being only simple Louise Carrol, I can but

counsel you to say 'I won't!' upon occasion, and say it sharply, too."

That little half-jesting talk had taken place long before. Perhaps, had he heeded his friend's laughing advice, his face might have worn to-night a different expression.

The susceptible, easily-influenced nature would take on such coloring as came nearest it. One skilled in reading character would have said now, instinctively, that the recent shades had been none too pure.

Harold was an only son. An only child until the coming of a frail little sister, who now, at seven years of age, had taught them all new lessons of how human hearts can love — and *fear*.

"Call her Lily," Harold had said, when, in the season of summer bloom and freshness, he first saw the wee, white face of the little one whose life had counted only three months.

So appropriate was the name, it was at once adopted. The years had in no way

lessened the resemblance. The fairness of her complexion remained the same. Purity seemed written upon her brow. This fragile life was — perhaps the more because it seemed so loosely linked to earth — the strongest safeguard to the loving, yet careless, ofttimes erring brother.

These two children of the family were surrounded with every indulgence. Lily kept her simple ways and child-like innocence. Harold, released from the restraints of school, drifted into gayety and extravagance. Naturally indolent, and lacking any strong incentive to work, he just glided along on the current of the days and basked in the sunshine as it fell upon him.

He was to be educated for his father's profession — the law. But upon leaving school, he had asked so earnestly for a year's *rest* before entering college, that his father had granted his request.

The year had but just entered upon its last half, yet his parents were already looking

forward anxiously to the time when he should resume regular duties.

There came a rap at the door, and two young men entered. They were evidently at home there, for as one took a match to light his cigar, the other approached Harold and put his hand carelessly upon his shoulder. He had a coarse face; not such a one as a mother or sister would wish to see smiling familiarly upon one they prayed might be kept pure.

"Well, old fellow, most ready? You see it lacks but ten minutes —"

"I can't go, Will. I'm sorry, but father —"

"What! The old governor forbidden it? So you had to run and tell him. Well, Hal Lawton, you are slow!"

Harold's face flushed redly. Boys of nineteen are rarely willing to endure the charge of cowardice, or — why is it? — of obedience.

"He hasn't forbidden it; but he doesn't think it's a fit place to go, and for that

matter, I don't either." He was interrupted by an angry oath.

"So that's all it amounts to, waiting three nights, and coming over here for you now. It's shameful of you!"

His companion had not yet spoken. Now he turned and joined the talk nonchalantly, his cigar held between his fingers.

"You're consistent, Lawton, certainly. If smoking, and swearing, and gambling, to say nothing of occasional drinking, haven't troubled your conscience, it does seem a little squeamish to be afraid of a pleasant ride to Clark's hotel, and a little dance afterward."

The cool insolence of his manner was very hard to bear. At his indifferent, carelessly-spoken words, Harold winced as though they tortured him. But he had learned too much of the ways of the world to cry out in honest, passionate protest against the influences that had led him into sin, and now strove by taunts and ridicule to push him still lower.

"Well, if you really can't go, stay at home. I never want boys to disobey their fathers."

The patronizing tone had its effect.

"I tell you I am not under orders. Of course, I can go if I choose. But it will be a miserable affair, and I don't think I *want* to go."

Will's manner, at a glance from his companion, changed.

"Well, Hal, if we don't like we can leave. To tell the truth, I've something of a headache to-night myself, and don't want to make a late evening anywhere. Come, go with us for two hours!"

Harold hesitated.

"Say yes, please," from Edward Stanton, the eldest of the trio.

"Well, yes it is, then. But seriously, boys, I don't feel right about going. However, I shall be here again in two hours."

He didn't see the significant smile upon Edward's face, or notice the impatient shrug

of Will's shoulders. Had he done so, it might have been different, even then.

Harold put on coat, hat and gloves hastily, stopped a moment to take his cigar-case from a locked drawer of his book-case, and was ready to follow them. One glance around the room, then he turned off the gas, and the picture was darkened, *darkened.*

. . . . . .

Look, now, into another room, upon this same evening, far up among the New Hampshire hills; so far that when the morning mists had cleared, one could see from the eastern window the hoary heads of the mountain-monarchs who maintain their changeless thrones.

It was a low-ceiled chamber, close under the sloping roof; not quite high enough to be always convenient for the curly head which yet carried itself most proudly there, as with a royal consciousness of possession. In summer the climbing vines that shaded the front of the old brown

farm-house made a delicate net-work for the windows. Now, however, in default of summer greenness, the bare twigs rustled shiveringly against the panes.

It was not a very beautiful home; barren of ornament and luxury, and situated upon the rugged hillside where the sun glared oppressively in summer, and the wintry winds seemed to spend their bitterest force. Few neighboring houses were in sight: not one which betrayed much save poverty.

To such a quiet, lonely home had Allan Grantley come after his life at Merrivale, and taken up, with brave cheerfulness, the duties of his way.

There was no prospect of college for him, unless he chose the weary years of arduous toil, unavoidable in his case, and ran the risk of shattered nerves and ruined health, even if he succeeded.

But *he* craved no rest after his school course. The words of little Henry Davis had come to

him with peculiar force. "It's only mother and I" was applicable also to his circumstances. Perhaps other things in the boy's simple story had touched him nearly. Were I to tell you just his actual experience during the eight years prior to this time, you would scarcely credit it. Hard work to live, but he had lived, and pressed on in the way he had chosen.

Just now he was *waiting* — doing the work upon the farm which he had heretofore entrusted to strangers. He had anxious hours, and, as a truthful historian, I am compelled to admit there were also some impatient ones.

But as a general thing he was content, finding, even in that outwardly meagre life, meanings which enriched his deepest experiences, and strengthened every fibre of his being.

Perhaps he had never fully realized how his mother must have missed him till he measured it by her joy in having him once more at home. This was the compensation for what he had lost. Very naturally, he missed the culture

and companionship of the past four years.

The hard-working farmers who had spent their lives in forcing sustenance from those rocky hill-sides, had little time for attending to finer wants.

There must be hunger somewhere for us all. If they chose to starve certain faculties of whose existence they were well-nigh unconscious, who shall blame them?

Such rugged, stalwart lives, missing what they may of delicate finish, are yet not seldom animated by high principles that vivify and ennoble them.

Already Allan, looking below the surface, had read these counter-meanings. Already he had determined that through no fault of his should the children in the neighborhood, uninstructed save during a brief, poorly-cared-for school-term, be allowed to remain in ignorance of the great world outside their own humble sphere, nor of truths that should make them realize that all this present life, whatever its

successes or its failures, is but a "getting ready" for the real living whither this tends.

His mother, ready always for every good work and word, listened patiently to all his earnest talks concerning the young people of the vicinity. After one of these evening conversations which had drifted into that thought-pregnant silence the world's workers know so well, she had said:

"Your wider opportunities, my son, increase your responsibilities. There is so much greater danger of our doing too little than too much for other people! Your father"—her eyes had a dreamy, absent look, and she seemed to half-forget the present in some memory which her words evoked—"used to have a great many plans for doing good here. I would like that his son should fulfil them."

Few considerations could have had more weight with that son. It had always seemed to him like an unfinished poem, the life of that young father who, almost a score of years

before, had been called away from the wife that loved him and the little child that was just learning to lisp his name.

His child, grown now almost to manhood, could have no dearer or more living ambition than to make real the unfinished work of that life.

During the winter he had taught an evening class with most gratifying success. In addition to that, he had, within the last month, started a Sunday-school for those who seldom attended divine service, and on Friday evenings the members of it were invited to come to him for such instruction and help as they needed.

He had on this evening spent an hour with a dozen or more of his scholars who had come to his house in the early twilight. At eight o'clock he had bid them "good-night," standing in the door a moment, with kindly last words for them all, and then re-entered the room alone. His mother was

absent for the night, detained by the sickness of a friend.

The young man sat down by the window, wiping his damp forehead wearily.

"But it pays!" he ejaculated presently, as if in answer to some unexpressed doubt in his mind. "It is surely worth all the trouble."

Sitting there alone he peopled the room — it was a queer fancy of his — with those he would have liked best to see. For the time, he could make it seem as if he were in the midst of a merry company.

A little start, and the dream faded. He was alone in the plain little room. The wood-fire in the open stove had burned to ashes; the air was chilly.

He sighed a little bitterly.

"What will it lead to, I wonder. If I were sure of success — but never mind! there's no good in questioning. What was that I read to-day in *Hymns of the Ages?* 'He surely wins who sides with God.' That's a thought

full of comfort. I guess I am sure of success, if I deserve it. Perhaps not just what I would choose, but I must remember that it will be the *best*, even then."

From the beautiful words of the hymn his thoughts went on to the best cheer, to the fountain whence he oftenest drew deep draughts of comfort. "*Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*"

He uttered the words softly, reverently, his eyes looking into the boundless distance through the moonlight, and his heart permeated with a sense of absolute rest and strength. The earnest face, white and weary now; the noble head, held erect in such free unconsciousness; the lips, just uttering the great Teacher's words; the eyes, fathomless with thoughts that take hold on eternity; the dim rays of the little lamp upon the table, scarce obscuring the silver light that falls upon him, make up our second picture.

And these two, looking now in such opposite

directions, have been as brothers during the last happy years! Receiving the same teachings, living outwardly the same life.

Why was it that the one had steadily grown in firmness of principle and sweetness of character, while the other had formed habits that degraded him, and friendships that proved a snare? God knows. What do not those words hold! They seem the final rest from troublous questions. We say them sometimes almost thoughtlessly, forgetting, in our ignorance, that He *always* knows. But He never forgets; and so the lives go on, some on treacherous quicksands, some upon dancing, sunlit waves, and others, aye! many, through depths that no light of our earthly giving can ever reach. And when it all perplexes us, and we strive with our weak human wisdom to read the riddles, what can come with such a balm of healing to our hearts as these two words — God knows!

I have shown you these two pictures as they were. But He could efface all unsightly stains,

and add colors of heavenly beauty. He could wipe them out utterly. And He can *wait*, as with a love we never on earth can comprehend He *does* wait, for the artists themselves to fill up the outlines, and perfect, in his good time, the picture.

CHAPTER V.

THE QUIET CHAMBER.

"I AM far from well," Bertie had written to Louise in the early spring. As the weeks passed, and the days grew longer and brighter, the earth putting on its garments of youthful life, the young girl had to realize that all this glad freedom of air and flowers and bird-song failed to impart to her the bounding vitality which had seemed a part of her nature.

"I am so tired, papa!" was her frequent weary plaint when he asked for evening music or reading. "To-morrow I guess I shall be better, but I've no strength to-night."

And so it came about that when May was just giving place to blossoming June, the weariness grew into actual disease, and the cheeks that had

been so strangely pale during the springtime became flushed with fever.

"Where is Bertie to-night?" inquired Mr. Arnold, glancing uneasily at the lounge where for many days he had found her lying, her eyes languid, but the smile with which she always greeted him bright enough to veil the real change in her face.

"In her room," was the answer from Mrs. Matthews, the housekeeper. She was a relative of Bertie's mother's and a valued friend in the family.

"Not any worse?" anxiously.

"I fear so. It really seems to me that the child has a settled fever. I have been trying to prevail upon her to let me call a physician, but she is very much opposed to it. I hope you can persuade her."

Mr. Arnold hastened up-stairs to his daughter's room.

"My poor child!" as he stooped to kiss her.

She only gave a weary smile in answer.

"Why, what hot little hands! Have you been so sick all the afternoon?"

"Oh, no! And this will pass off in a few hours. I was almost as feverish last night."

"This will never do, darling. I must have Dr. Andrews in directly; and I guess he will scold me for waiting so long."

"Oh, papa —!"

"But, my daughter, I want you to get well and strong. You really need a doctor's care for a time. I have been thinking of it before to-night."

"Just as you think, only it seems so much like being actually sick; and perhaps I could be down-stairs by to-morrow."

"Hardly, I'm afraid. I'll send Mrs. Matthews to sit with you till I come back, my dear."

Going down to the dining-room, he spoke to her, and was hastening from the house when she called to him.

"Supper is waiting. Won't you take a cup of tea before you go?"

He glanced at his watch. It was a half-hour past the usual time.

"I guess not. Don't wait any longer, Mrs. Matthews. I don't feel at all hungry to-night. Somehow, these first warm days take away all desire for food."

The outer door closed quickly.

Ah! the warm days had little to do with it, the kind-hearted woman knew. That chamber, whence he had come, held all that the proud man really *loved* on earth; the only child who had ever called him father; the gentle image of her who, for one brief year, on life's dewy morning, had called him *husband*.

"I don't know," she soliloquized, "what would become of him if anything happened to Bertie. He just makes an idol of the child. It's wrong, I know, but — bless her sweet face! — I can't much blame him."

Re-entering Bertie's chamber, she chatted as cheerfully as she could to keep up the courage that was so evidently waning.

The young girl was unused to sickness, and it seemed such a dismal thing to her, this helpless waiting for the physician's grave verdict.

Mr. Arnold soon returned, bringing with him Dr. Andrews, a benign, fatherly-looking gentleman, his face a little wrinkled, but fresh with something better than youth; and his kindly voice one to inspire confidence in a moment. He was no stranger to Bertie, but, till now, his calls had been simply friendly. Even his familiar face seemed strange in the feverish haze that surrounded her.

"Well, little girl, how is this? Sick, are you, or only a little nervous?"

"Both, I am afraid. Sadly nervous, at all events."

He took her hand as she answered, his face growing suddenly grave.

"Raise the curtain, please, Mrs. Matthews. I want to see my patient."

With his finger still upon her wrist, and his keen, professional gaze directed toward her face, the doctor continued talking, questioning a little, watching more. At last he turned to the table to prepare some medicine.

"What is it, Dr. Andrews? Not a fever?" from Mr. Arnold.

"Indeed, I am afraid it is. It is a very unhealthy season, and it seems your little girl must suffer the evil in common with others."

"But don't feel discouraged, Bertie," with a quick look toward the bed. "We'll take wonderful care of you. With such a doctor and such a nurse, you won't have a chance to feel neglected."

A few hot tears stole from beneath Bertie's closed lids. None but the father saw them, who, bending over her with a whispered word of comfort, soon brought back her wonted smile.

"Now," said Dr. Andrews, as he finished his directions about the medicines, and resumed his place in the arm-chair, "what about taking care of our patient? It is worth everything for one experienced person to have entire charge in the sick-room. Can you give up your time for that, Mrs. Matthews, or shall I find some one?"

The lady hesitated, looking at Mr. Arnold. His first thought was, that he could more easily find some one for duty here, than to oversee all the domestic machinery below stairs. But before he made any answer, a quick exclamation from Bertie decided it.

"Oh! I can't have any one but Mrs. Matthews. Papa, she *must* stay with me."

"Certainly, my darling, if you like it best."

Her wish was his.

Presently, with many kindly wishes, and the promise of an early morning visit, Dr. Andrews took his leave, Mr. Arnold following

him down-stairs, anxious to learn fully his opinion of Bertie's sickness.

A moment later, Mrs. Matthews was called from the room to give directions to Katie, a new girl, who, just then, was trying her patience sorely, and Bertie was left alone.

Alone, and in just that weird twilight hour when the lengthening shadows could shape themselves to her mood, and add a new tinge of dreariness to the cloud which had settled upon her spirits. The tears, unforbidden now, fell fast. Her head ached with a hard, throbbing pain. She was ill, and, with a shuddering sense of dread, realized she might become — how much worse?

Her fevered imagination pictured all the possibilities of her sickness. Perhaps she might even go down to death, and then —

She heard the chapel bell giving the call to evening service. She wished she could go. But it seemed so far away! How quickly

she was growing drowsy! She put her hand to her forehead dreamily.

"I wish papa would come! I didn't want them to leave me," she murmured; but to her dulled senses the consciousness of alarm grew strangely indistinct. She was sick; she might die; and God was so strange to her! She didn't want to go away from them all into an unknown blank. But even with the thought, her eyelids drooped. With a strange sense of dizziness, of falling through immeasurable space, of being lost, *forgotten* somehow, she sunk into an uneasy slumber.

A little later her father found her muttering disconnected words in a troubled dream. And this was but the beginning of the hard battle between life and death. Day by day the fever raged more fiercely. Mrs. Matthews, watching over her with almost motherly solicitude, grew less and less hopeful.

Her father's face was white with the dread he could not express; and Dr. Andrews, who

came in every few hours, sometimes forgot to wear the encouraging smile they so anxiously watched for, in his fear that the young life was going down into the shadows.

And so, waiting the tardy crisis, they cared for her and prayed. Sometimes there were hours of calm and consciousness, when the blue eyes would open with something like a natural expression. One glance of recognition would repay them for hours of anxious watching. But at last these ceased. Her disease, typhoid fever, assumed its most alarming form, and the shaded chamber rung with her wild laughter and incoherent words.

The father's heart almost stood still, thinking of what might come when that strange mirth grew quiet. His darling's voice, sweet and gentle ever as the chime of silver bells, how was it changed! now harsh and discordant, sharpened by the fever that seemed burning her life away.

How strange it seemed that all around him

life could be going on as ever! For himself, all that meant aught of joy, of hope, of pleasant ambitious dreaming — his *life*, so far as anything earthly could be that — was within that darkened room where the June sunshine vainly strove for admittance, and the perfumed air failed to rouse the deadened senses of the sufferer.

Men met him on the street, with faces that grew sober with sympathy, and voices that softened in their inquiries for his child; then went on to their business or their pleasure, and straightway took into their minds some new interest, and forgot their pitying thought of her till another chance sight of the father's face recalled it.

He realized this fully and bitterly. What did it matter to them? They might well smile, for their homes were not gloomy with sorrow; *their* children were out in all the beautiful life of the summer. Who of them all would pause to think that for him all the sunshine was fading?

And the heavens above him, the blue sky unflecked with clouds, the air resonant with bird carols — oh, it was hard! Nowhere could he find the help, the comprehension he needed. He tried to pray, but the words seemed to choke him. He cried out passionately against himself, remembering how many times he had uttered the holy words, "Thy will be done," in solemn communion with his Master. Now, that blessed will might be — could it be so cruel? To speak the words then would be a mockery. He could only ask piteously for mercy.

The physician, a life-long friend as well, watched him anxiously. He remembered a time, long, long before, when he had been summoned to that house to help resistance against disease. He remembered with a quick thrill of sadness, intensified by looking at the face so like hers upon the pillow, how futile had been all his efforts. And thinking of what came after, of the weary months when

no voice of friend or kindred could rouse the bereaved husband from the lethargy of sorrow, he trembled to think of the result, should this last treasure be taken. So with cheering words he strove to keep alive the fires of hope. At last, when he dared no longer to give encouragement, he ventured to speak of Him who loved them all; who was as surely in that chamber, and as tenderly mindful of his child now as ever in her life's sunniest hours.

The father listened uncomprehendingly.

Mrs. Matthews kept in her own heart — she could not tell Mr. Arnold — of the rare hours when the young girl woke to consciousness; of the momentary anguish which filled her face, and the piteous entreaty of "Don't let me die!" that tortured her listening ears.

It was very hard. The mind shattered by sickness could not attend to her answering words. The weary cry in Bertie's own voice was followed

always by strange, unconscious moanings and sick fancies.

It was Tuesday morning. "Just a week from to-day she will be twenty-one," the father thought, as he paced slowly back and forth.

Will be! Would have been, perhaps. She may go to where there are no birthdays of our human reckoning. He stopped before the window. What a bright sunny morning!

A climbing rose reached a few stray blossoms in at the open window against her piano. The tender, graceful flowers! It almost seemed as if the vine that had had her loving care longed to give this little mute reminder of its gentle pity. Some one had gathered flowers for the vases. The kindly thought failed of its intent. The sight made him almost harsh. Why should any one else take her place, even in a trifling matter like this!

Thus the days wore wearily on. Hope and fear alternated within the father's breast. At last Dr. Andrews stopped at the dining-room

door one morning, and spoke to him in a hushed voice.

To-night, then, he would know. Know whether this very life of his life was to be spared to him, or whether she was to leave him as her gentle mother had done.

There would be *nothing* left! What a day that was! He walked his office floor as the hours went slowly by, and when, at last, he sought Bertie's room, the pallor of his face almost frightened Mrs. Matthews.

Bertie had lain in a stupor through the day, her thin, blue-veined hands lying parched and hot upon the counterpane, the fingers feebly moving from time to time. This movement, and the light, scarcely perceptible breathing, were the only signs of life.

At nine o'clock the doctor came in, prepared to spend the night with them.

"She will lie much like this till about midnight; then there will be a change," he said, in answer to some query of Mrs. Matthews.

Through the weary hours they waited. Mrs. Matthews moistened Bertie's hot lips, or chafed her slender hands. It seemed so little aid to give in the decisive battle that was being fought.

Mr. Arnold stood leaning against the window, looking out into the night, trying to brace his heart to bear what he felt was coming.

"O, Mary, Mary! I would give her up to thee, but thou canst not need her as I do." Thus his stricken heart moaned in its despair.

So busy was he with his thoughts, which yet brought no comfort, that he had not noticed a slight movement around the bed till a faintly-murmured "Father!" caught his ear.

Aye! he may well thank God, as, turning, he meets his darling's eyes bright with recognition, though the momentary strength is gone, and she is unable to speak again.

The old doctor's face worked strangely.

"Now, good friend, I want you to go to

bed, and not undo all my work in this style," he grumbled, as Mr. Arnold knelt beside the bed, sobbing like a child. But his face was very gentle as he added: "Please God, she'll pull through now!"

In his library, Mr. Arnold spent the remaining hours of the night in communion with his God. His joy and gratitude were too intense for words, but he promised a more entire consecration to the Master who had dealt so lovingly with him.

Bertie's gain was very slow, but it seemed sufficient joy to her friends to see her faint, sweet smile, and realize that she was *here*, for them to love and care for, instead of *there*, beyond their utmost reach.

CHAPTER VI.

LONGINGS.

NETTIE CARRINGTON drummed listlessly on the piano, ever and anon casting anxious glances toward a figure at the window. At last she could bear it no longer.

"Margaret Carrington! I know you are going to fail me now, crying at that rate, and making your face look like a lobster! Do you *know* what you are doing?"

The elder sister wiped away her tears and tried to smile. It would have been far pleasanter to spend the evening in writing to Bertie the loving thoughts which filled her heart; but to her fine sense of honor, the promise was sacred. So she bathed her face, and smoothed back the dark hair, which,

much to Nettie's regret, she could rarely be induced to crimp.

"I must stay till I see your hat is fairly on, or you'll go off into another paroxysm," grumbled the little pleader, a good deal mollified, however, by the evident haste Margaret was making in her preparations.

Ready at last, they started, in company with several friends, for the hall, and found themselves in excellent season.

The concert was really worth attending; the audience select and appreciative, the music varying in character from songs rendered in fine style by a bewitching little balladist, to grand symphonies, and the glorious anthem at the close.

Margaret, borne along on the waves of sound, felt the thrill of harmony through every nerve; read plaintiff meanings in minor strains that trembled through the hushes, and, while the merry songs were *encored*, and her friends on all sides were smiling their approval,

she dreamed of the one who was lying, even at that moment, in the weary languor of disease.

Nettie, meantime, was listening for the most part, making, at the same time, little running commentaries in her own mind upon the dresses and hats that pleased her fancy; and before the evening was over, and she met Margaret's eyes as they turned to go out, she had decided upon a spray of French flowers to adorn her dainty lace hat, and arrived at the momentous conclusion that fawn kids were unquestionably "the thing," and that she must get some directly.

The letter was written the next day; and before she said good-by, Margaret devoted a page to a certain very urgent request she had to make.

"When you get stronger, Bertie, you must come here for a few weeks; months would please me better. I want you so much! and I think the change might be beneficial to you.

I can't say as many coaxing things as Louise does, but you know I shouldn't ask you unless I really meant it, don't you, dear? I shall be very much pained and disappointed if you refuse. One thing more: if you will come and make me a long visit, I'll return it with interest. Indeed, I'll go home *with* you. What more can I say to prove my sincerity! Because, as you know, I never enjoy promiscuous visiting." Such was her answer to Bertie's pleading note.

"Mother," she said suddenly that afternoon, "do they allow girls under twenty years old in the hospitals?"

"As patients? Yes, sometimes," answered Mrs. Carrington, affecting not to understand her meaning.

"No, that isn't what I mean. I was wondering whether even a young girl, if she were strong and healthy, couldn't do a great deal of good."

"Many young girls think so, evidently," was the reply. "My own opinion is that

zeal can't quite be substituted for knowledge. It pains me to think of suffering uncared-for, but too many inexperienced nurses but increase the evil."

Margaret sighed.

"O, mother! if we only could do all the good we dream of doing!"

"Why, then, dear child, the millennium would be at our doors." She spoke seriously now. "I know what you mean, my daughter. But people so often ignore the close-crowding duties to grasp the far-away ideal. I have never yet seen a life that I thought *too* faithful to the thousand-and-one little cares and duties which are surely given us by the Master, who was not unwilling even to 'wash the disciples' feet.' Yet, I like to see your eager wish for service, my daughter, —

> 'To let the new life in, we know,
> *Desire* must ope the portal.'

Give me my scrap-book from the table, please,

"There, dear, take it to your room to read."

and let me find that poem. I am sure you will enjoy it. There, dear, take it to your room, to read, and get a little comfort from the being 'good in thought,' until God opens the way for pronounced 'action.'"

Margaret listened attentively. She was very like her mother. She had inherited from her the strong nature that must work, or wear itself out in vain strivings. In the *one* that nature was satisfied with home cares and responsibilities, its impetuosity tempered by the patience God had given in answer to her earnest prayers. The other, young and restless, had not learned yet her own needs, nor the limitations of her powers.

It wasn't hospital work she needed. The same discontent would have followed her there. She would have been forced to realize painfully how infinitismal was the part she could do, compared with the mighty work she had intended to accomplish.

Her mother's mild words crushed that dream

even at its beginning. She had no wish to give the world *crude* work of any kind, and she lacked the requisite training. Her restless fancy constantly suggested new plans, but there was always something to thwart them.

She wondered at the simple interests that seemed to content Nettie, yet oftentimes found herself envying the merry good-humor that could be so easily sustained.

Margaret, Louise, and Bertie had laughingly agreed, when leaving school, to write a sort of retrospect of this year and forward a copy to each of the others on the anniversary of graduation. The time was drawing very near. Margaret expected a queer, racy sketch from Louise, and something sweet and pure from Bertie. For herself "there is nothing to write," she thought bitterly. But she would not break her word, so a few days before the time agreed upon, she sat down and wrote as follows:

"I can chronicle naught but emptiness. The year has held for me no noble work nor hearty joy. It has been, in

all important respects, a failure. I have tried to enjoy it, and that has been, I believe, my only ambition. Can anything be more ignoble? I am no stronger, no happier, certainly no *better* for it.

"I miss you and love you. The memory of our old pleasant days is as fresh as ever. And if I ever am a woman you need not be ashamed to call your friend, it will be largely due to the influence of the Merrivale years.

"For the present I am not going higher, perhaps not losing ground, but just creeping along in the old way. That sums up the time since I said 'good-by.' May your living have been nobler, better. May that yet to come be bright with God's blessing."

Such was her morbid picture of her life. She took a fierce pleasure in sending the lines to her friends, conscious, though she was, that they would not accept just such a discouraging statement as fact.

Louise did send, as she had anticipated, a lengthy and interesting history of her year, putting herself constantly in the most ludicrous light, and giving to the whole account such a coloring from her comical way of saying things, as to cause more smiles than sighs. She yet failed to keep quite out of sight the self-denial

and brave endeavor that had made the twelve months such an honorable record.

Bertie, of course, could send them but the merest remembrance. It brought the tears to read it, with its brief words of steadfast affection, that had been mindful of them even at the darkest.

Margaret was conscious, after reading both their letters, how her own abrupt, reckless summary must have pained the readers. But in her present mood she could make no other estimate.

Turning over the contents of her writing-desk half absently, her eye fell upon the poem which her mother had given her several days before, and which other calls upon her attention had caused her to forget. Taking it up now, she went over to the window, the better to read it in the fading light.

"Humph! 'Longing.' I can do enough of *that* without any help." But the defiant look died from her face as she read.

LONGING.

"Of all the myriad moods of mind
That through the soul come thronging,
Which one was e'er so dear, so kind,
So beautiful as longing?
The thing we long for, that we are,
For one transcendent moment;
Before the present, poor and bare,
Can make its sneering comment.

"Still, through our paltry stir and strife,
Grows down our wished ideal;
And *longing* moulds in clay, what life
Carves in the marble real;
To let the new life in, we know,
Desire must ope the portal;
Perhaps the longing to be so
Helps make the soul immortal.

"Longing is God's fresh heavenward will
With our poor earthward striving;
We quench it that we may be still
Content with merely living;
But, would we learn the heart's full scope,
Which we are hourly wronging,
Our lives must climb from hope to hope
And realize our longing.

"Ah! let us hope that to our praise
Good God not only reckons

The moments when we tread His ways,
But when the spirit beckons;
That some slight good is also wrought
Beyond self-satisfaction,
When we are simply good in thought,
Howe'er we fail in action."

The paper dropped from Margaret's fingers. The shadows deepened around her. The evening hush pervaded the little room. Only God knows how far "life shall carve in the marble real," the longings of that hour.

CHAPTER VII.

TOGETHER AGAIN.

"AUGUST, Auntie! I never was so glad for the month to begin before."

"And now it's just for what it will bring you, I fancy. Poor child! You will find the heat hard enough to endure."

"Just look at me! Do I look like a weak invalid? I am not afraid of a little heat."

Bertie was sitting in the great arm-chair by the southern window, amusing herself sometimes with her book, oftener in watching the passers-by.

Her long curls had been sacrificed during her illness, and her hair clustered now in little rings close to her head. It gave her a singularly youthful appearance, which was not lessened by the

simple white wrapper she wore. A tiny spray of flowers was fastened at her throat. Altogether, earnest eyes and white face, she seemed like some gentle flower fairy, or an impersonation of utter peace. But her next words reveal the characteristics of humanity.

"Mrs. Matthews, I am positively ashamed. Here is Louise coming to-morrow, and I've nothing to wear. Actually, not a single new dress this summer except these plain ones."

"Well, won't her friendship stand so severe a test as that?" laughed her listener.

"Of course it will. Only one likes to be as fine as possible when anybody they love is coming."

Mrs. Matthews only smiled. She had a way of smiling a whole sentence at the person with whom she was talking, and Bertie answered her as if she had spoken.

"No, auntie; I *don't* think that's foolish. I certainly never care to dress much for the people I don't care for. And it is not

vanity, I'm sure it isn't, that makes me want to look well to my friends."

"I believe you, my child. But don't be troubled. You certainly won't frighten her."

It didn't seem as if "new dresses" would be quite in harmony with that little white face, and graceful figure. She still showed too plainly whither her path had lately tended, for those who loved her to think much yet of mere fanciful adornment.

Bertie was not gaining rapidly. Her father was greatly pleased when he heard of Louise's intended visit. Perhaps the very atmosphere of merriment her coming would bring to the quiet house, was just what his darling needed to brighten and cheer her.

As for the invalid herself, she was almost childish in her delighted anticipations. A dozen times during this day had Mrs. Matthews been sent into Louise's room to devise something more for her comfort.

"Though I am not going to let her stay

there at all," she would add, "it will seem a little nicer to offer her a separate room at first; but I shall beg her to come with me after a little."

She could hardly go to sleep that evening, because of her excited pleasure. The next morning Mrs. Matthews found her sleeping soundly, and was careful not to rouse her.

"It will be worth more than medicine to her," she explained to Mr. Arnold as she intercepted him at the door of his daughter's room. "I wish she would sleep a good two hours longer."

It was ten o'clock before she heard Bertie's call-bell. Going up-stairs, she found her with a brighter tinge of color on her cheeks than she had yet seen during her convalescence, her eyes clear, and her voice cheery and strong.

"Oh, what a lazy girl I am!" as she told her the time. "And Louise will be here at three o'clock! Only five hours!"

It came into Mrs. Matthews' mind once or twice during the forenoon what a terrible disappointment it would be to her charge if Louise failed to come that day. But she was relieved on that point a few moments after train time. The carriage returned to the house, holding another occupant.

Bertie could hardly content herself with giving her first kiss from the window, but being still too weak to leave her room, was obliged so to do.

Mrs. Matthews, in the hall, received the briefest of salutations in acknowledgment of Mr. Arnold's introduction, and got a pleasant but confused impression of a bright face very fresh in its coloring, great, happy-looking brown eyes, and a pretty little hand that was stretched out to her hurriedly, as its owner turned to follow Mr. Arnold up-stairs. The greeting *there* was not too hasty.

Louise was startled, despite her previous knowledge of her friend's sickness, at the

pallor which was so much more intense than she had expected. She drew the little fragile creature into her arms in a close embrace, too happy and too much moved for many words.

An hour later Mr. Arnold, going into the room, found Bertie lying on the lounge, and Louise sitting beside her brushing the short curls as they talked—it would be difficult to say which spoke most rapidly—"of when we were at Merrivale."

"I guess Bertie's cure has commenced," he said good-humoredly to Mrs. Matthews in the parlor. "She needed youthful company. I think we must prevail upon the bright-faced little girl to stay quite a while."

It was as he predicted. Louise seemed to bring with her the elixir of health. At all events, in a week from her coming, the invalid ceased to be a prisoner in her own room, and walked down-stairs quite strongly.

"Tell me how you liked school-teaching," she questioned one day.

Louise looked up from her work — a handkerchief she was marking — and smiled, shaking her head at the same time.

"Yes; I want you to."

"Would it interest you much, *ma belle?* It isn't such a dainty, poetic life as yours. It's solid and substantial and all that. I'm afraid *you'd* call it dull."

"Why, Louise! I've been to school. I always liked it, then; so why shouldn't I like to hear about it now?"

"Last winter I used to write you about my school. There's nothing new about that one, but this year I have a different position. I'm twenty miles away from home, and am lady principal" — she drew down her face soberly, and sat erectly dignified as she pronounced the words — "in the Academy at Brandon. The school numbers about sixty scholars. Of these, I have entire charge of the juveniles. And, Bertie, they invariably find my weak side, and impose upon my good

nature. Wouldn't you know they would?

"Among the older ones, the 'incorrigibles' who try Mrs. Burnett's patience beyond endurance are sent into the recitation room to Miss Carrol. Occasionally a few of the best scholars share that lot. There, in the pleasant little room whose windows overlook the river, I have worked and enjoyed since April."

"And don't you ever get tired of it?"

"Rarely. It's good work, Bertie. Whether I am just fitted for it, I don't know, but it does take hold of my heart wonderfully. It is pleasant to think what waves of influence I can set in motion there. And it makes one more careful. I wouldn't wish to think or act hastily before my scholars. When I do, it gives me a heart-ache afterward."

"Well, Lou, one thing I want to ask. Do you find children better than you had supposed them, or worse?"

Louise took many stitches in her embroidery before she answered. The question held fuller

meanings for her than it had done for Bertie. At last she spoke slowly.

"I think I am learning to be tolerant. I find so much in my own life that I can't explain or even excuse; so many sins creep unaware into my heart, that I try to be very slow in passing judgment upon others.

"Have I found children better than I imagined? Yes. And worse? Yes; but they have helped to teach me one thing: to deem every human soul of priceless value, even when it looks at me from eyes that show few rays of purity. I have seen, in that little room where they come to me for daily help, more to encourage than to disappoint me."

She looked at Bertie a little deprecatingly.

"Am I wearying you with all this serious talk?"

"No; I love to hear it. Tell me how they have taught you this."

"Well, when I first commenced teaching, I was very sensitive to little faults in the children.

Unpleasant peculiarities of appearance or manners disturbed me. I found myself taking quick dislike to some poor little creatures for no more of a fault than stammering speech or awkward ways. I determined to get above such a small weakness as that, and I made myself remember that every one of these children was dear to somebody. That some mother had loved them all the way from their tender, helpless babyhood, and was hoping always that they might be in all things happy and honorable.

"That thought did me good; but another came afterward that has helped me more. Every one of these little lives is as precious in God's sight as my own. The day must surely come when I shall stand as weak and helpless before Him as the weakest of these all. Could I bear to tell Him that I neglected one of his little ones for a causeless prejudice? Above all, could I tell Him that I turned from the erring, simple ones who needed in twofold measure my pity and my love?

"So, you see," smiling again, "I try to think of it in that light. And it helps me wonderfully."

"Why, Louise, how you have studied upon it! I'm afraid, dear, you're getting beyond me."

"We both ought to be a little beyond what we were a year ago. I was thinking of it last night before I went to sleep, how we had both been *led*. It came into my mind then to ask you something, Bertie. I don't want to seem inquisitive, but have you come back from this terrible sickness just the same as before?"

"I'll tell you sometime. Not just now." And the talk drifted into other channels.

In the evening, Mr. Arnold listening to the merry talk that kept them laughing, thought as others often did: "What an attractive girl she is! It's a pity she hasn't some touches of seriousness."

Bertie knew better. She had seen the

truest phase of this many-sided character, and she knew that earnestness was not lacking in that nature which always showed to her its truest and best.

One afternoon there came a ring at the bell, and Bertie, looking out, exclaimed with sudden perturbation, "It's Mr. Warren, to see me, I guess."

"The physician?" inquired Louise.

"No. Our pastor. He said he should come in again this week." The servant came up with his card for Bertie.

She went down to the parlor, the color flushing painfully in her cheeks. The hand she held out to him was nervously cold.

It seemed scarcely reasonable to feel afraid of Mr. Warren. He showed at first glance a kindly, helpful nature, and the look he gave the little shrinking figure before him was almost fatherly in its affectionate interest. He did feel a peculiar attachment for this one of his young people. He had married her parents,

attended the funeral of her mother but two short years later, and had baptized the tiny babe she left.

That motherless girl could never seem to him quite as others. From the day when he had held her in his arms as her unknowing infant eyes looked at the flower-strewn form in the coffin until now, he had watched her course solicitously and with unforgetful prayers. Now he questioned her face keenly.

"Have you anything to say to me to-day, Bertie?" he asked at length, after they had talked a trifle constrainedly of various indifferent topics.

She shook her head.

"Nothing?" with lingering, regretful accent. "You made my heart very happy a few weeks ago, when you told me of your resolve to seek the Saviour. Can it be, my child, that you are so soon weary of the effort?"

Bertie's heart beat rapidly. How could she put into words the exact truth of her expe-

rience! She spoke in a moment, with quick, nervous abruptness.

"I did try, Mr. Warren. I have been trying; but it's blind work!"

"Yes, Bertie."

"Things don't seem the same to me that they did in my quiet sick-room. Then the whole world was shut out. Now it is before me again, and I find it so easy to gravitate to the old way of thinking."

"Which means no thinking at all, I am afraid. Bertie, I don't want to seem unkind, but I must speak frankly to you. If in so short a time as this you could forget any of the friends who ministered so unceasingly to your needs during that dark time, we should think you pitifully thankless and ungrateful. What can I say, then, of the feeling that lets you forget the Friend who loved you best, and helped you most? It seems to me thankless — thankless."

Her eyes filled. Bertie Arnold was generous

in feeling. She could not hear such words as these unmoved. But oh! if she could make her pastor understand how vague and unreal it all seemed to her — this mystery of regeneration.

"I know you are disappointed in me," she said sadly. "Do me this justice, won't you? Believe that I *have* tried."

"I am not wholly disappointed. You deny Him by your weak delay and indifference. But so many have done it before you! The taints of our frail human nature are in every heart. The same nature which dwelt in those who, centuries ago, reviled, persecuted, slew Him. And, Bertie, you remember that when He might have escaped them, He would not. You remember the bitter taunt they flung at Him, '*Himself he cannot save.*' And He hearing it, feeling, as He alone *could* feel, all the agony of that hour, endured it to the end.

"Much as you may dream and sentimentalize about your dainty theories, the plain fact remains. There was bitter need of that sacrifice, else it

had not been made. He did not suffer this agony to save us from any trifling danger. He bore it all to give us a chance of *life*.

"A chance, Bertie. It is not forced upon us; only offered. If you take it, He blesses you now and always. If you refuse, I can do no more than I am doing. I have prayed for you very earnestly, my child. I shall not forget you; but I cannot become a cringing suppliant in this. Thy Master's free gift, holy and precious beyond our ken, must never be abased and made of little worth."

"O, Mr. Warren," she exclaimed piteously, "don't speak to me like that!"

"I don't mean to be cruel, Bertie, but you know I have talked with you so often during the last month! It troubles me a little lest I have been trying to do the work for you. Won't it be better for you to think for yourself? I have said enough." His voice was very solemn.

Her troubled thought found utterance.

"Oh, then I am left all alone! So utterly alone,

for the nearest I can draw to Him is by your help. If you give me up, I shall hardly dare look up to Heaven. I don't know why," breathlessly, "but I never can make myself feel that God really cares in just the same patient sort of way you do. I wish I could."

"In the way I do! My child, I am only your minister. I may die to-morrow, or I may go from here and give my time and thought to new interests. Then, though I should not forget you, my poor narrow heart would be well-nigh filled with other thoughts. That's all we can promise each other in this world. But He doesn't forget or grow tired of us. Yes, Bertie," replying to the question in her eyes, "He does know sometimes when hope is gone."

"Well"—her lips were dry, her hands clasped—"and how much can it matter to Him, among all the beautiful angels in the shining heavens; how much can He care for a few souls, lost or saved?"

"Bertie, when He said '*I am with you alway*,'

I am sure He meant it. The heart that was tender unto the weakest life then, is the same to-day. And whether He cared then, we know. Surely none ever uttered a tenderer cry than He over his lost Jerusalem. The '*I would*' and '*ye would not*' blended into a plaintive lament over the woe He had striven to avert. But we needn't go back to the written history. Every life is full of his lessons. You think it wonderful that Lazarus was restored to his weeping sisters; but you find it very hard to keep in mind that He brought you from the very shores of the river of death back to health and happiness. The love, the mercy, are the same. You can look with admiring eyes into the dim past, but you ignore the providence-illumined present."

"I know God has been very merciful. I wish I could feel it in the very depths of my heart."

"God grant you may!" He rose to go. "Bertie, if at any time you wish to speak with me, remember how glad I shall be to see you.

Until then I can hardly feel like introducing the subject again."

"You have been very kind to me;" her lip quivering as she spoke.

He took her hand as he said good-by.

"I shall pray *for* you to-night, instead of with you."

She felt the difference with a desolate sense of loneliness. He had knelt there so often and besought the Lord's blessing for her! And she — why! she realized now that she had accepted it as a matter of course. Every such thing had seemed to her only what she needed and might expect. And now the strongest prop was taken away. And then, her times of quiet musing in her own room were drifting from her. More and more it seemed she must learn to rely on herself.

Bertie had tried to be in earnest. She had come back to conscious life with an awed sense of God's power and tender forbearance. That feeling was strong upon her in the dim twilight

of her sick chamber. In the light and sunshine of busy, active life it grew dim; almost faded from her mind sometimes. It remained to be proved whether it would utterly vanish, or be revived into a saving power.

She pondered seriously, sitting alone in the parlor after she had watched Mr. Warren's tall figure down the street, what she ought to do.

She had told her father that this renewed life of hers should be consecrated to the Lord. She knew she had his most earnest prayers. How would he feel if he knew Mr. Warren had ceased to plead with her?

It was an hour before she could compose herself enough to join Louise above-stairs. They had been reading *John Halifax* when she was called away, and had nearly finished it. She found, when at last she went into her room, that Louise had put away the book till such time as they could share its closing chapters.

She noticed that her friend's busy fingers were at work upon some needed sewing of her own,

and so offered to read aloud to her. Why was it that in a few moments she came to these words —

"Aspiration which never can rest, nor ought to rest, in anything short of the One absolute Perfection — the One all-satisfying Good, '*in whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*'"

She read the words slowly. No sure rest anywhere else; and oh! she *could* not find it here. She read on until she finished the book, and laid it aside; talked of its contents a few moments with Louise, then walked to the window and looked out at the leaden sky. A storm was gathering, and the clouds seemed marshalling in sombre columns in the west. A dull, dreary tone in the wind made her sigh. Oh! the world looked, for the moment, very gray and gloomy. And she could not pierce the clouds, and so look upward to where the sun was shining. But nothing of her pained revery was uttered to her friend.

Only once — it was the day before Louise's long visit was to end — she alluded to her feelings on the matter.

"I am not a Christian, dear friend, but I am trying to be one. If ever I do come to love the Lord earnestly and sincerely, it will be the greatest joy I *can* ask. Now — I am — so discouraged — so tired!"

"I have feared so, Bertie. Don't get discouraged! He will surely help you. I shall be so glad, darling, when the time comes that you can call yourself truly a Christian," with earnest emphasis.

"And you?"

"Oh! I am just what I am. Don't try to measure yourself by me."

"But, Louise dear, I have noticed such a change in you."

"Yes; I am not utterly blind or heartless. But, Bertie, I am not a Christian. I have never been under conviction of sin. I don't know how one feels who is really penitent

and flies to the Saviour. But I most heartily reverence the Christian religion. I wish *you* were within the fold of the Church!"

Her face wore a softened expression, and her hand stroked Bertie's hair gently.

"And, Louise, I don't like us to be separated even in this."

Louise smiled.

"Little faithful Bertie! Does it wound you to go onward and leave us? Don't feel so! That isn't for you to determine!"

After which, she resolutely changed the subject.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ANNIVERSARY.

"YES, mother"—Allan Grantley spoke cheerfully—"it will be a year to-morrow since graduation. It scarcely seems so long."

He was sitting by the kitchen window in the hair-cloth rocking-chair of "best-room" memory, which his mother delighted in calling "Allan's." A fresh breeze blew through the room, bringing in the pleasant odor of new-mown hay and climbing honeysuckle.

Allan's face, radiant with health and happiness, had grown manly during that working year. There is a comprehensive calmness in its expression now that it had lacked a year ago; a look as of one who faces his future fairly, and squares his shoulders for whatever

burden may be placed upon them, sure that it is divinely placed, and so can be borne.

He had been looking at his hands, hardened with the toil of the summer, and mentally contrasting them with Harold's delicate, idle ones. Something in the contrast made him smile; but a moment later, as a sad thought followed like a shadow upon the track of this lighter one, he repressed a sigh, and turned toward his mother, just entering the room, answering some previous remark of hers with the words I have given.

"Did you find time to write to them all, Allan?"

"Certainly, mother mine. I shouldn't have been a very trusty class secretary not to attend to that. And many of them I've scarcely heard a word from during the time. Won't it be pleasant to-morrow if they all answer, as of course the majority will?"

"There have been no deaths?"

"None, I trust. Little Bertie Arnold has

been very sick, but I hear she is recovering. Harold wrote me of her sickness. Full particulars, as his cousin Josephine heard them. By the way, Harold hasn't been very prompt about writing lately."

Just then one of the farm hands came to him for directions, and Allan went out to the barn with him. He heard two of the other men in earnest conversation.

"Yes, beaten again," said one. "This is a terrible defeat."

"It does seem," answered his companion, impatiently, "as if there ought to be loyal men enough to crush out this rebellion."

"Aye, but it does. If it were not for my sick wife and little children I'd enlist before to-morrow."

The young man, hearing, turned and walked toward the door, as if to breathe the fresh air of morning. His eyes had darkened and deepened; his strong right hand was tightly clinched.

"Yes, John, take the horses. I am coming directly." He looked toward the house as he spoke.

His mother stood upon the porch, at leisure for a moment to take her share of sunshine and field-pictures. She strove always to keep her life fresh by these quiet influences that come soft-falling as the dew. Allan looked at her intently.

The sun shone upon the white hair, still thick and glossy, despite the sprinkling of Time's snows upon it; her face, the gentle, womanly face, wearing a faint bloom from the fresh morning air.

He walked towards the house hurriedly.

"Mother, you haven't got tired of me yet, have you? We've been talking about it, you know."

She turned and looked at him, her tall boy, who standing at the foot of the steps still almost reached to her level.

"The only son of his mother, and she a

widow." The words seemed uttered unconsciously. "*No*, Allan, I am not tired of you."

"I know it, mother. It came into my mind to ask you." He halted again, half way down the walk. "Don't work too hard this forenoon, will you? Lizzie doesn't need much help, and I hate to have you get tired."

He walked slowly up the hill. The sunshine failed to soothe the pain at his heart.

"Defeated again!" Oh, how many times must he live through that struggle that came to him daily! If he could but give all his young strength, from love as well as duty, to his country! But his poor widowed mother, ought he to think of going and leaving her? "If I were sure of coming back she could endure it. But how could she bear all the anxiety and fear? It is hard, bitterly hard."

John Armstrong, eager to communicate important news that had reached him since leaving home, spoke to him as he came into the field.

"Wilson's sons have enlisted, two of 'em,

and Bobby Murray. I don't know, Mr. Grantley, but that I shall go next." The rough, warm-hearted fellow spoke with honest feeling.

"I shall give you 'God speed,' John, if you decide to go. We've nothing too good to give to our country, not even life itself."

John's eyes flashed. "O, Mr. Grantley, I wish you'd get up a company. I'd like to have you for a captain."

The young man's glance wandered toward the house. The quiet figure still stood there — his mother.

"If I don't go, John, it's from no lack of patriotism. If I can judge my own heart truly, there is nothing too dear for me to yield. But there are other lives beside our own. We must think of them, too, you know."

"I know; I understand. You oughtn't to go, I suppose. If you go, I do believe it would break her heart."

The horses were pawing restlessly. Armstrong turned away to commence his work, pondering

in his slow, careful way upon whether he ought to go. Allan, who scarcely dared allow himself to think about it, hastened to where his men were waiting.

. . . . . .

The next day came the letters. He counted them hastily. Almost the full number. He took them up to his room for a quiet reading. I cannot give you in detail all their pleasant confidences. Some were especially pleasant. He smiled, reading what Louise said of herself.

"Let me think. Was I the genius of the school at Merrivale? I know I used to have my head decked in some way, but whether it was with the laurel wreath or the dunce-cap, I am too modest or too truthful to declare.

"I know my present position, however. I am 'highly accomplished and deservedly popular as Preceptress of Brandon Academy.' So said a recent copy of the *Gazette*, and such authority I don't presume to dispute.

"That's *outside*, Mr. Grantley. At heart I am much like the girl you knew, foolish enough and bad enough, but trying a little, too, in a weak sort of way, to get into the right path."

The letter went on through various windings, now merry, anon thoughtful, perhaps sad.

The reader smiled as he folded it.

"I am not so sure she is frivolous after all," he soliloquized. "I used to think she never could be thoughtful, but she seems to be working her way bravely."

Margaret wrote very briefly, giving a simple description of her daily life, as she might have spoken to a casual acquaintance. At the close a little touch of feeling was manifest.

"This of myself," she said. "For you, my best wishes, my kindest remembrance. I never think of you without instinctive joy that one, at least, of our number is a Christian. A Christian gentleman, Grantley! What higher ambition could you have? God bless you in that, always."

He read on through many more. Gracie told of her approaching marriage, tender joy running through all her words.

Carrie Gleason, the youngest member of the class, wrote him of failing health.

"Don't look sad, Mr. Grantley, when you read this, but I think, and I am sure my friends think, that this

is the last anniversary on which I can expect to hear from the absent friends. It almost broke my heart at first, but I am learning to bear it. Of late, I have forgotten to think so often about last summer, and the green fields all around the village. You know I was one of the merriest then. Now I only walk a few steps down the street, and come in with fluttering heart and wearing cough. By next summer I shall be safe at home, I think. Do you remember what the minister said to us at graduation last year? I have thought of it so many times. He trusted every one of us might keep our garments free from earth-stains; as pure and white as the draperies we wore that day. Sometimes now I look at my graduating dress and think — with a few tears, though not sorrowful ones — that I am to be taken care of. If I go now, I shall escape all the weary fight against 'earth-stains.' And Jesus has cleansed me from my sins. I am not afraid to go to Him."

The paper trembled in Allan's hand.

"Happy little Carrie!"

He recalled her quaint, merry speeches, her childish face and manners. Must this be her lot? For a few moments his eyes were too dim to read the next letter.

He found that with many of the young men of his class this had been a year of action. One wrote that he had gone into business;

another that he was teaching; several that they were hard at work in college.

At length he looked for Harold's letter. "He ought to write me a long one to atone for past deficiencies," he thought smilingly. But he failed to find the familiar writing. He looked them over a second time, but was again disappointed.

"Never mind; it will be here to-morrow."

Thinking thus, he took up another, which proved to be Bertie Arnold's.

She told, in few words, the history of her year; its quiet joys, its home peace and content, and then of the shadow that fell upon her in the early summer. He had heard of her illness before, but it came to him with new force reading her own words that gave such reality to the picture.

"Thank God, you are better, Bertie, my friend," he whispered, as he lingered over the letter.

The next was from Robert Harding, one of

the vigorous, energetic students who was always foremost in duty and in pleasure. It bore a Southern postmark.

"Thanks, Allan, for your thoughtfulness in writing some time in advance. Your letter was re-mailed to me from home, and I hasten to send my answer, trusting that it will reach you by the 23d, in season for the 'annual report.' I am down here where there's work to be done. I wish you were here with me, Grantley, but I suppose you are doing your duty somewhere else. As for me, I couldn't stay away. I am waiting now for action. And when there's anything to do, I hope to find my place till this is over, if I live. If I should fall — why, I ran the risk of that in coming — it would be a glorious death. I want to see the dear old flag in its place again, and what my heart and arm can do is done willingly."

Then came the last letter, in unfamiliar writing. He looked at the signature, "Oscar S. Montgomery." Not Frank's name, but his father's.

"I opened your letter, the father wrote," and read it with feelings which I leave you to imagine. At that very moment my boy was lying dead, wrapped in the Stars and Stripes he loved. I put your letter into his hand,

knowing how he would have grasped it, living. He went away from home three months ago. 'I shall be home this summer. Never fear,' were his parting words. And he *has* come. We hush our mighty grief and try to remember how nobly he yielded up his life. But it is terribly hard to bear, even then."

The restless look came again into Allan's face. "Frank has gone beyond me." He scarcely realized, at first, that he was dead, only that he was forever honored.

He put the letters away in his desk, and taking his hat, walked down to the grove. To-morrow he must re-examine, and write his report based upon what he had read. But this first hour must be given to eager thought. What a changeful, crowded year it had been! Love and death, glory and suffering, mingled strangely in his thoughts.

It was hard to realize that little Carrie was slowly going out from life. Harder still that Frank Montgomery was gone even now.

Ah, there would be vacant places at their reunion. *Reunion!* Is there such a thing, really, in this ever-changing world?

He mused a moment drearily, then his face brightened. His thought went *upward.*

Going into the house in the early twilight, a little worn and weary, he paused at the open door, hearing his mother's voice, then entered the room so quietly as not to disturb her reading.

> "One who, because he overcomes us so,
> Because he is most noble, and a king,
> Can well prevail against our fears, and fling
> His purple round us, till our hearts do grow
> So close against his heart as not to know
> How weak they are alone."

The thin, weak voice dropped into silence. She closed her book, and rose to leave the room.

"Thank you, mother. You have done me more good than you know."

She put her hand on his hot forehead.

"Are you sick, my son?"

"No; oh no! But this is one of the days, you know. I'm only tired, I guess."

"As not to know how weak they are alone," he repeated to himself as she left the room. It was the triumphant answer to his pained discouragement.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEAT, OR TARES?

PRETTY Nettie Carrington stood by the dining-room window one fresh September morning, drumming restlessly with her finger-tips, and trying very hard to keep back the tears that filled her eyes.

Her mother, coming in, noticed her depression, and stopped to ascertain the cause.

"What troubles you, Nettie?"

The girl tried to smile as she answered: "Nothing much, mother. Only Margaret"— her tone grew resentful —"has been saying all manner of things to me about the croquet club, and at last, declared positively that she will not play or even make her appearance when it meets here. I don't think it's a bit

kind or sisterly of her, and I've told her so. I daresay her ladyship doesn't like it, but I am entirely out of patience with her airs."

The mother raised a warning finger.

"'Count twenty-five, Tattycoram,'" she expostulated, in comical imitation of the excellent Mr. Meagles.

Nettie, who was noted for her admiration of Dickens, smiled at the allusion. But the clouds gathered again.

"Well, mother, do you think it's just right in her? I don't mind it so much if she doesn't choose to play, but to say such contemptuous things! I am hurt and angry. I can't help it."

"Perhaps there is some reason more than you know, darling, for Margaret's feelings. I will talk with her about it, by and by. Very possibly the croquet club may not seem so important to her as to you. She is older, you know."

"Yes, mother, I do know. And she always

used to be kind to me, but lately I don't admire my elder sister very —"

"Nettie! I *can't* listen to you when you speak like that. If Margaret has said unkind things there is no excuse for you to imitate her. I wish my little daughter would learn to subdue her temper."

The girl seemed touched at her mother's gentle rebuke. She was very amenable to good advice, this same little Nettie, and it was seldom indeed that she presumed to differ from her mother's expressed opinion.

Mrs. Carrington sighed a little as she went to her room. Busying herself there with her morning duties she was conscious of a painful sense of discouragement.

Such complaints from Nettie were growing far too frequent. The mother felt sadly certain, from her own observation, that occasions for them were manifold. And now, when Margaret was entering upon womanhood, why was it that she seemed to cause more discords

in her daily life than she had ever done in childhood? She was not quite satisfied thinking how quiet she had been in the matter. She had hardly been willing to speak to her daughter of the morbid restlessness that marred her own happiness, and that of those around her. She had hoped it would gradually wear away, but week by week it seemed to become a more confirmed habit of the mind.

The mother's loving, observant heart was conscious of some discordant strains in the music of that young life; of something lacking from the harmony that her bright, fresh youth should have made. She resolved to touch the chords with gentle hand, and try to attune them better.

With the afternoon came an opportunity. Several of Nettie's young friends called for her to join them in a walk. And thus Margaret was left alone with her mother.

Her face wore rather a forbidden expression. She had not wholly recovered from the morn-

ing's ill-humor, and Nettie's quiet, somewhat sad face had been a reproach to her. When Margaret was ill at ease, she always seemed out of temper, and now, when her mother began speaking to her, there was small encouragement in the averted face before her.

Her first words were unimportant.

"I'm glad the girls have such a pleasant afternoon. They are so happy in these rambles."

"Yes."

"I suppose you took a great many such when you were at school."

"A great many, yes. Not precisely such as these, I fancy."

Mrs. Carrington looked up questioningly, but Margaret's black eyes were bent upon her work, and failed to meet the glance.

"How were they different?" she asked at length.

"Chiefly, perhaps, in our remembering that we were rational human beings, and not chat-

tering like so many magpies about dress and kindred topics."

"Why, my child! Aren't you a little uncharitable? You certainly don't *know* that such is the staple of their conversation."

Margaret bit her lip, repressing the reply that came into her mind. It was a part of her code of honor to be scrupulously respectful to her parents. And she spoke at last in a far milder strain than when addressing poor Nettie.

"I have heard them talk many times, until I grew so weary of it that I avoid the entire clique. I don't want to be uncharitable, but, mother, certainly, I never knew such frivolous girls as Nettie's chosen friends and companions. There's nothing but froth and nonsense in any of their lives."

Her mother's face was very grave.

"It would be just as fitting for you to condemn the rose-buds and the violets, Margaret, because they are not fruit-laden, or in any way useful. In spring we look naturally for spring

freshness. Blossoms and perfumed daintiness now, and real growth and fruit-growing by and by. That's the natural order of things."

"Yes, mother; but the staring, flaunting hollyhocks and poppies please us less than the pansies and the lilies. If you use that simile, I must still beg for gentler, more retiring spring flowers."

"I am tolerably well content with those we find about us. I love my own little wild rose which blooms among those you condemn, quite too well to desire much change."

Margaret was silent.

"It seems to me," her mother went on, "as if the trouble lies — in part, at least — elsewhere. I greatly fear that there is some glamour over your eyes which prevents your seeing the best side of these natures. Careless and thoughtless these girls may be: I do not doubt it; but I know well their warm, loving hearts. And then, sixteen years is such a very short time to have lived. One feels more like wondering that they

have learned even so much of life than blaming them for what they do not know."

"But, mother, it wasn't such a very long time ago that I was sixteen. I know I wasn't quite so shallow as Jennie Whipple and Lizzie Whiting, for instance."

"You were unlike the majority of girls, Margaret. You were more mature than most. Now, you are no more like other girls of twenty; but, my daughter, I had rather see you less intellectual than to feel that the brain development had dwarfed and chilled the heart. You don't seem happy or content of late. I have noticed it for months; and I have tried to make your life pleasant and profitable. But I am coming gradually to feel that the fault is not in your surroundings, but in yourself. I think you must apply a remedy *there*."

Margaret's eyes flashed for a moment, and her lip trembled; but only for a moment. When she spoke, it was quite calmly.

"Upon this subject of Nettie's companions we cannot, probably, agree. Perhaps I ought to tell you that this morning I declined any further association with them. If you think I *ought* to associate with them, however, I will do so."

"Not grudgingly, or unwillingly, daughter mine. I don't want you to feel bound to any society which is uncongenial. It isn't that which troubles me. It is this spirit of intolerance, of scornful indifference that seems so wrong. I wish that might give place to something gentler."

"It can't. I am only honest in speaking as I do. They disgust me. But nothing interests me. It makes me almost desperate sometimes to look on through all 'the weary waste of years,' and think of this barren, thirsty life of mine."

"Don't do it. Never say that again."

Mrs. Carrington spoke almost vehemently.

"If you grow weary of such a life as

yours, Margaret, God may give you something different. He tries us in many ways. When we murmur in our prosperity, we cannot wonder if He covers us with the salt waves of sorrow."

"I dare say the fault is in myself. I ought not to speak in this way to you, but now I have begun, let me make out as plain a case as possible. Here I am almost twenty years old; a woman who ought to be doing her work in the world somewhere, and I am just idling away my time. I have education enough to make me long for nobler privileges, broader culture; and I have ambition that stops only at the highest, and that goads me cruelly in this life whose blessings are the very chords that bind me down. I know I ought to be content and thankful. My lot is very pleasant. But, mother, the actual of my experience is as unlike my earlier dreams as the gray-tinted, cloudy day is unlike the crimson sunrise which preceded it."

"And yet, Margaret, I am sure those 'earlier dreams' of yours lacked something. You know the beautiful city above needeth no light of sun, nor moon, for the 'Lamb is the light thereof.'

"Missing that illumining, your rarest day-dawn, your fairest noontide, your brightest western sky has but an earthly radiance. Did you place that day-star in your pictures, Margaret?"

"Not always, nor often. But I have not been quite forgetful."

"I tremble for you, sometimes, my child, when I think what providence may lead you to the peace and content you need.

"To some, He comes in the still, small voice of daily teachings; to others He sendeth terrible lessons that remain graven indelibly upon the quivering heart that receives them. It seems to me, my daughter, that He has appealed to you by every generous blessing. He has just crowded your life with

mercies, and now you cry out against its emptiness. Blame him not if he fills it in his own way!"

"But, mother, what would you have me do? Am I to blame if I feel this horizon too narrow? I am longing for action; to feel that I am of some use in the world. I am weary of inglorious idleness."

Mrs. Carrington smiled.

"There does seem a difficulty. My own days are always so busy I haven't realized that time was hanging so heavily upon your hands. The eldest daughter in a family certainly has no need to complain of not having anything to do. To be sure there is no actual necessity for you to take charge of much work — for the present, at least — but there are many duties you could most profitably assume. In the first place, it would be very pleasant for me if you would share my calls and visits. I am often too tired to attend to all I wish in society, and it would be a great relief if

you undertook to return civilities which I very many times am obliged to neglect. Then, Margaret, I've heard papa say, almost impatiently sometimes, 'I did expect when Margaret came home she would interest herself in riding with me, and going about as she used to.' You could brighten his few leisure hours wonderfully.

"Again, Nettie is exceedingly anxious to read French, which she hasn't yet commenced. How could she do better than to begin the study under your supervision? You say you long for broader culture; then gain it. Take a regular course of reading and study, with teachers or without, as you may choose. Work off these dreary discouragements. They will vanish of themselves in the atmosphere of busy exertion and cheerful effort.

"I tell you, Margaret, you will find the truest happiness in *forgetting to seek it.* 'He that seeketh his life, shall lose it.' 'He that loseth his life for *my* sake and the *Gos-*

pel's' — notice the condition — 'shall find it.'"

"You are making it very practical." Her eyes showed a gleam of interest. "Certainly you have given me enough to do."

"Not too much for your present state of mind. I think leisure is unhealthful for you. You can enjoy that better when you get more truly reconciled to life. I want to make my words practical, and I want to add plainer ones still. Take the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, and you will begin to live worthily. Look upon the life He lived on earth — that toilsome, care-filled life — and you will realize how little he spared himself, even though he oftentimes lets *us* rest so long that we grow discontented.

"Be a Christian. Thus and thus alone can you reach the ideal of your thought, the dim vision toward which you look with such craving earnestness."

A ring at the bell, and their colloquy was ended. But Mrs. Carrington noticed that Margaret did not leave the room, as was her wont,

but remained to chat cordially with Mrs. Green, a somewhat tiresome old lady who talked of her favorite hobbies — homœopathy and church doctrine — vibrating between medicine and theology in a manner singular to witness.

Margaret did think, "And society is largely made up of just such absurdities!" but a look at her mother's intellectual, yet sympathetic face modified the thought.

The old parable of the wheat and tares holds good now as ever. The strange commingling of opposite elements go on throughout the world. She need not vex herself to right all the wrongs or infuse sense into all the follies. Her cheek flushed a little. She was thinking of what her mother told her once when she was begging for something to do.

"Just a very little attended to faithfully, Margaret, is worth more than all the half-finished work in the world. I see a very great tendency in you to try your hand at everything and finish nothing."

Was the fault of the child conspicuous still in the woman? She listened more patiently to Mrs. Green's platitudes, because of her self-accusing thought.

When Nettie came home that night she was surprised to find her sister strangely gentle and affectionate to her. The warm-hearted little creature readily forgot the disagreement of the morning in present kindness, and the transient cloud passed. As days wore away and no other darkened their domestic sky, Mrs. Carrington began to hope a radical change had been effected in Margaret's way of viewing things.

In this she was, to some extent, mistaken. The change was owing more to regard for her, and to a resolute will, than to any change of feelings.

Margaret followed her mother's advice in many things, proving a thorough and faithful teacher to Nettie, and an agreeable companion to her often-wearied father, who was proud of his daughter's talents, and liked to stimulate

her to new researches. She planned a busy winter for herself.

"I do hope Bertie will be well enough to come here before my birthday," she said often to Nettie. "It seems discouraging that she remains so delicate."

Bertie, meanwhile, was hoping strongly that she would be quite well with cooler weather, and able to take the journey which had been quite beyond her strength during the early autumn.

"What a splendid girl your sister Margaret is," said Jennie Whipple to Nettie one night as they sat in garden-chairs at the foot of the lawn, after the other girls had left them.

The croquet club had flourished, and Nettie had been annoyed by no more scathing remarks about her friends. Very unconcernedly Margaret joined them sometimes, and always treated the young girls with the utmost kindness.

"I do think she's ever so nice!"

Nettie thought the admiration was hardly mutual, and felt somewhat amused.

Margaret, sitting by her open chamber window, heard Jennie's words. She smiled a little sadly. "You are warmer-hearted than I am, despite your so shallow speeches," she murmured. "Well, I'm trying to treat them all well, and it's certainly the best way. But, after all, I am not happy yet. Mother was right. I have only the earthly radiance in my pictures. Will they ever hold any thing better?"

CHAPTER X.

I WILL NOT.

THE autumnal days grew shorter and more chilly. Winter was coming rapidly. The lengthened twilights, the long, hazy afternoons, the calm of air and sky during the bright days of Indian summer, the changeful brilliance of the forests, were giving place to the gray skies, leafless trees, and biting frosts of December.

Margaret sat in her room just at dusk, debating in her own mind whether to go out to evening meeting, or remain at home and finish her book. Finally, she marked the place where she had been reading and laid it down; lighted the gas, and going to the mirror began to brush the heavy black hair that fell low upon her forehead.

Once and again she hesitated restlessly. At last, with a look of intense earnestness upon her face, as the bells rang out the hour, she resolutely hastened her preparations. As she stood in the bright light of her room, she seemed very unlike the girl who had caressed Bertie Arnold upon that other evening when we first saw her.

The olden constraint, almost awkwardness of manner, had worn away. She was now as stately as ever, but more self-reliant and graceful in her young womanhood.

Her dress was plain — that was always her taste — but elegant. One daintily-gloved hand held her little Testament; the other twirled the silken tassel of her muff; but her face — Margaret's face! — it wore a look that would send a pang to any loving heart. It seemed as if some bitter touch of worldliness or reckless pain were hardening it, so tightly compressed were her lips, so utterly cold the brightness of her eyes.

For many weeks she had been battling against a strange new feeling that had taken possession of her. It was a season of deep religious interest in the place, and she had not been free from the influences of the hour. Sometimes, as the Holy Spirit had striven with her, she had almost yielded. But her proud, stubborn heart would grow hard again. And now, when many of her young associates were rejoicing in a new-found Saviour, she was still outside, ill at ease, miserable, but obstinately determined to resist her agonizing convictions.

Of late she had absented herself from many of the meetings. It seemed as if she persistently kept out of the way of good. There were anxious hearts at home, but none deemed it wise to seek her confidence.

Little Nettie, after many tears and prayers unto the Lord, had at last found him who had cared for her through sixteen happy years. She would go forth now into life with a new

strength, an earnestness inexpressibly sweet and touching, combined, as it was, with her natural joyousness and childish trust.

She had told her sister of her great happiness. Her loving heart was full of prayerful thoughts of Margaret. But the elder sister was cold and quiet when she strove to plead with her, and the timid, tender voice would falter and almost fail at such icy indifference.

But Margaret was not cold. She was suffering. She could understand something of the preciousness of Nettie's faith. She remembered once, years before, when her heart had been deeply stirred; and she could not ignore the value of that love which would brighten life and illumine death itself for Nettie. Would that she too had found it! So she felt in her softened moods.

To-night she walked down the street, past the chapel where their own meetings were held, on to a remote part of the city. She did not wish to see a single familiar face. If

she could but creep in somewhere, unknown to any, and take her share of the manna which should be given to hungry souls in waiting, she would be content.

It was a plain room that she entered at length. The light shone upon simple, quietly-dressed people; upon faces that told their story of hard toil and unrequited effort.

The beauty and freshness of life were not represented here. It seemed as if the weary ones had come into this still, sacred place for shelter from the outside storms that buffeted them. Margaret took a seat near the door. Her eyes were downcast, her head bowed. This seemed to her "more real" than the familiar gatherings at the chapel. Those she saw there had the good things of this life. Religion was to them a help, an added gift. But these toil-worn faces and hardened hands; this plain, scanty clothing; the pathos of the whole assembly was something totally different.

"And the poor have the gospel preached unto them." For a moment there came to her a gleaming consciousness of the tender beauty of the words. Was not the religion that would come to *all*, boundlessly, better than the culture to which she aspired? Would she not find a purer, nobler happiness at the feet of the risen Christ, than in all the wisdom of the ages?

But they were beginning to sing. She recalled her wandering thoughts, and listened. It was no artistic performance. The music, as such, was weak and faulty, but the spirit of song was in their hearts. One voice after another took up the words of the old familiar hymn. She saw tears upon many faces as the tender yearning of the heart thus found expression in words. She found herself involuntarily joining in the closing stanza.

"There, safe thou shalt abide,
There, sweet shall be thy rest,
And every longing satisfied,
With full salvation blest."

The voices died away in silence. Then the pastor knelt in prayer. Margaret felt herself a stranger and alone as he spoke of those who had come there night after night for the heavenly blessing. All the others had sacred mutual memories of mercies that had been given them in that room. For her there was nothing! The prayer was not yet finished. She caught a few words that might bring a blessing, even to her.

"If there are others, O Father, strangers to us, who have entered with us into thy presence here, oh may they not be strangers unto thee! Hold in thy tender love every heart now before thee. Whatever pain, whatever remorse, whatever sense of unquiet longing, whetever penitence that would abase itself in the dust before thee, these human hearts contain, is known unto thee. What we fail to see is clear to thy vision. O, Lord, thou who willest not that any should perish, be very tender unto us in our need and pain. Bring us, Father, every one — oh, that it

might be so!—into a saving knowledge of thy grace."

Her tears were falling like rain. She heard the slight rustle as the worshippers raised their heads, then the sound of singing. But it seemed remote and dreamy. She was in the presence of a thought that held her hushed and subdued by its wondrous power.

By and by she glanced toward the minister, a man of threescore years, his hair whitened, his face marked with lines that time, perchance many a hard experience, had graven there; his voice full of a tenderness that he had caught from the Love which was the mainspring of his life.

She judged, from allusions, that he had spoken to them previously of the judgments of Jehovah. To-night it was his love. "Let the goodness of God lead you to repentance." The *goodness*, not fear, or a wish for safety and reward, but "the goodness of God."

"It scarcely seems fitting," he said at last,

"for me to expatiate upon that goodness. Were I speaking to you of His followers — of Peter, who denied him, but whose heart well-nigh broke in the burst of passionate remorse that followed; of Paul, who counted not his life dear unto himself, and who joyed to walk through every path of suffering whither the Master led; of John, whom he loved; of any among them who, not alone by that last sacrifice of death, but by all the years while they were serving him, consecrated themselves unto their Lord — I might speak words of loving admiration.

"But this other life — this coming of Christ into the world; the love of God that sent the only-begotten Son unto sinful man — what can I say of these, save with trembling voice and prayerful heart? You who, like me, have learned through years of experience the exceeding preciousness of this love, will comprehend my feelings.

"And are there others, many, who know it

not? What can I say to you, dear friends, you who stand in such fearful danger that my heart yearns over you with intensest pity?

"I have told you of his power; that despite all our puny pride and independence, we are in his hands and subject to his will. I have tried to make you feel how fitting it is that the Lord Jehovah, who formed the worlds, in whom we live, and move, and have our being, should rule our lives. As his servant it has been my duty to make plain to you the whole truth. Now I bring you a tenderer message. Come with me away from the mount of judgment and of condemnation, away through years that held the mingled lights and shadows of the world's history till the time when Calvary became the mount of promise to humanity! Listen to the words the great Sufferer uttered in that hour when the sun was darkened and the world shrouded in blackness beneath the woe that voiced itself in that bitter cry 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!'

In that hour He could still say of those who knew no pity, 'Father, forgive them!' He could make tender provision for the mother who was to be so sorely stricken. He could assure the repentant criminal by his side of pardon and safety. And when he went up to the heaven which had been his home through all eternity, he loved the world so tenderly that he was willing to return to it to make visible and certain unto those who mourned the fact of his resurrection. Heaven itself could not make him neglect a loving-kindness.

"That is the way He has loved us, *does* love us. Such is the 'goodness' that seems not beautiful, but forbidding to human pride."

"One word, now, for you to take to your homes and think upon, I trust, with prayer. The Lord who reigns omnipotent in earth and heaven loves us so well that he longs to win each poor, weak, sin-stained heart unto himself. If you fail to come to him, it will be your own terrible mistake; a mistake you

will deplore throughout an endless future."

How very still it was! Margaret looked about the room as he ceased to speak. Here and there a face was hidden from sight. A little child near her moved somewhat restlessly. She put out her hand instinctively, in plea for silence. The woman who sat next her was weeping, her handkerchief to her eyes, the thin, blue-veined hand that held it trembling.

A little further on she noticed a young face, not older than her own, certainly, which shone with a great joy. She scanned this girl intently. A slender, drooping figure, clad in simplest fashion, the utter neatness of her attire not concealing its poverty; scant, close-cut hair and thin, meagre face. But the eyes, large and gray, pathetic, even now, despite their luminous shining, told that unto her tender messages had come as the blessing of a waiting Saviour. Margaret sighed.

Another hymn was read. They rose to sing. Still with that strange sense of being in a

dream, she stood with the others as the words came faintly at first. She joined them with her rich, strong voice. It quivered a little at length.

"Say, will ye have this Christ or no?"

The solemn, decisive question. "Will ye have this Christ or no?" The last word prolonged itself mournfully. It rung in her ears like the dirge of hope. Was it to be such to any there? The benediction was pronounced, and they rose to go. Some lingered. Mr. Whitney, the pastor, turned to go down the aisle toward Margaret. He had noticed her face, and a something in it — an expression she would have proudly veiled had she known it — appealed to his pity. She saw that he was coming towards her, and hastened out. Hurrying past the others till she was safely outside, she turned toward home, walking rapidly, with decided step. It was a dull, sombre evening, and Margaret's thoughts were hardly brighter or more cheering.

The words of the hymn haunted her. She could not get away from them. "Say, will ye have this Christ or no?"

Then, in some strange way, others came to her mind. "Friend of sinners was his name." "*Friend of sinners.*" She looked up into the sky. It was very dark, very far away — this heaven whither He had gone. Could He be the same "Friend of sinners," even now? The question was answered for her.

> "Now above all glory raised,
> He rejoices in the same."

She could not flee the words. Home at last, and how late it was! Ten o'clock, just as she reached the house! She looked into the parlor for a "good-night" to her parents.

"Margaret, where have you been? I thought you were in your room. Why, my child, are you sick? How white you are!"

The mother's face grew anxious.

"No; I'm not sick. I've been down the street to a meeting — a lecture — and I am very tired."

She walked around the table to where her father was sitting dozing comfortably in his arm-chair. Stooping, she kissed his forehead.

"Good-night, mother!"

Her lips were dry, though she tried to speak steadily. She threw her arms around her mother's neck, and pressed her hot cheeks to hers.

"Good-night, my daughter," still looking at her with tender questioning.

Margaret answered as though she had spoken.

"No, mother. I am quite well, but so tired;" and she left the room.

Mrs. Carrington took up her sewing. She looked troubled for a moment, then smiled contentedly. She could leave her darling in God's hands.

Margaret stepped softly into Nettie's room. Perhaps, had her sister been awake, she would have given her her confidence — it might all have been different — but Nettie was sleeping peacefully.

Margaret stood a moment by the bedside,

looking down on the rosy, unconscious face, with a strange depth of tenderness; then, pressing her lips on the pure, white forehead, with a whispered "God keep you, my little sister," she sought her own room.

Even there, to her excited fancy, the same words seemed pulsing through the air: "Will ye have this Christ or no?"

She sat down to think.

At last came bitter words. "I cannot, oh, I cannot! I do not understand it. I am not broken-hearted for sin. It was just because the others were so that I became so moved. I will not be a hypocrite. If we are driven to repentance, how much reality can there be about it? I cannot."

Then it came into her mind:

"*Will* you, not *can* you, but *will* you or no?"

"I do not feel as I ought. I am weak, and tired with the struggle. It don't make me any better. I find no help, nothing but

suffering. I am going back to where I was before. I was happier then."

She had laid her Testament on the table. With a strange feeling of longing that contradicted her words, she took it up and opened it. This was what she saw: "*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise . . . but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" She closed the book.

Beautiful as were the words, sweet as was the tender, comprehensive love that so held all the nations of the earth, she could not find comfort. Her heart grew hard and bitter with its pain.

"I am not going to torture myself longer in this way. I wish I could forget all those hymns and warnings. Oh, why did I go!"

"Say, will ye have this Christ or no?"

For the last time the question was considered, then she answered it.

"I will not." Then, for the light half-

frightened her, she turned it off, and tried to sleep. Within and without was darkness.

She had dared to utter the impious words "I will not." What a darkness, what a loneliness was left to her!

CHAPTER XI.

HOPES AND FEARS.

HAROLD LAWTON'S course had been tending steadily downward since the evening when we witnessed his defeat, because he was too weak to say "No," and abide by his decision.

When he first came home, the genial, cordial manner that made him popular everywhere, caused him to be much sought after, and no entertainment was considered a success unless Hal Lawton had helped in the management thereof.

But rumors of too grave a nature to be disregarded, concerning his daily walk and conversation, caused anxious parents to prohibit the invitations to their houses which had formerly poured in upon him.

In fact, he was made to suffer a social ostracism that touched his pride to the quick.

But there was one hope remaining: He was to go to college in a short time, and surely — with his pride and his sense of honor and decency — he would endeavor to be a gentleman *there*. There, too, he would be among entire strangers. The story of his disgrace would not be whispered about among them all, to make him reckless with shame.

The parents comforted themselves with these thoughts, aud when, day after day, they could see new traces of dissipation upon their boy's face, they counted the time till he should go, trusting much in the effect of the change. Little Lily, with a child's quick perceptions, realized that something was wrong with her brother, but it never occurred to her loving little heart that Harold could do anything wicked. She ascribed all the change to some trouble or sickness. And Mrs. Lawton was careful to keep

all knowledge of the real state of the case from the sensitive little girl.

One night — it was the last before Harold was to leave them — she came home from school sobbing bitterly.

"What ails you, my child?" questioned her mother, as she drew the little figure into her arms and tried to soothe her.

"O, mamma, Helen Archer has been talking dreadfully about brother Harold. She says"— sobbing still more passionately — "that he gets intoxicated! my own brother Harold!

"I told her she should never, never say such a thing to me again. But she kept laughing at me, and all the girls looked so strange about it. What made her say so, mamma? What could make Helen so cruel?"

"It was very unkind of her, darling, and I wouldn't pay any attention to such things. She will be sorry when she thinks it over, that she said any such thing to you."

Lily was crying still, but less bitterly.

"And he is going away to-morrow. I think it is too bad to talk so of my dear brother."

"Don't mind it, pet," and Harold himself stepped from the adjoining room, where he had been packing his books. "Brother Harold doesn't care at all for their nonsense, and certainly Lily won't."

She brightened as he spoke.

"But, Harold, I did care terribly. What made them ever dare to say so?"

He took her on his knee, and Mrs. Lawton resumed her sewing. She gave him one quick warning look. She was fearful that he might tell the child that which the mother wished to keep from her as long as possible.

"What could make them? Oh, a good many things. There are some people in the world who enjoy nothing as well as to slander others. Perhaps you praise me too much to them. If you do, Helen Archer might do it just to annoy you."

"Well, I will never love her again;" very decidedly.

Harold smiled an odd sort of a smile without much cheer in it. After it had faded from his face, an expression of contemptuous recklessness lingered there.

His mother noted it sadly. It pained her that this unfortunate remark should have reached him on this, his last day at home. Now he would go away with the dreary consciousness of lost respect and ruined reputation to discourage and harden him.

"Don't care for it, my son," she said to him an hour later, when Lily, soothed and made happy again, had gone to practise her music-lesson. "You will live it all down, I am sure. You can make them all respect you again."

"I scarcely care to, mother," bitterly. "I am losing my old faith in people. I am a poor, weak fellow, at best. If it wasn't for you, and my father, and the little one"— his eyes grew moist for a moment —"I should give up trying."

Mrs. Lawton laid her hand tenderly on his head. She was a loving mother, but she had never learned to pray for herself or her children. Some such thought as this came into her mind now. She could not help her erring child by any intercession at the throne of Grace. But she was almost driven there in this new pain and perplexity.

"Harold," she said solemnly, "God knows that, dear as you are to me, I would rather see you laid by my dead brother's side in yonder churchyard, than to see you become the wreck that intemperance made him. If you go on in this way, you will ruin your own happiness; you will make your father an old man before his time, and your mother"—she tried to speak steadily—"oh, my child, my first-born! your mother cannot forget when she first held you, a little innocent baby, in her arms. It would have broken her heart then to know that you would grow up to a dishonored manhood. O, Harold, for your own

sake, and for ours, be true to yourself."

He was deeply moved. He acknowledged all his weakness and sin. He made many a promise for the coming year. He would be surpassed by none in the purity of his life. And looking into his face as he spoke thus, the mother was comforted.

Mr. Lawton was less sanguine. A man of the world, familiar in his profession with every phase of sin and failure, he knew how easy it was to tread the downward path when once it had been entered. And he understood Harold's nature so well! Still he would not despair. Perhaps the boy might be saved without keener suffering.

It was when Harold was at the lowest, that Allan Grantley's anniversary letter reached him. He carried it about with him for two or three days unopened.

At last, one night, suddenly remembering it, he read it and began answering it. After several attempts he gave it up in despair. He

wouldn't pain Allan by telling him the truth, and he couldn't quite ignore the facts if he wrote at all. Furthermore, so entirely had a single year changed him, he took very little interest in writing.

"Al is a good fellow, but he's awfully strait-laced," he said confidentially, an hour or two later, to Will Bralton as they sat together on the hotel piazza, smoking. "I don't think I could get on with him now as well as I used to."

"Probably not," with a covert sneer. "A minister, is he?"

"Oh, no. And I guess he won't be. He's pious enough for it, but lacks the funds. I'm rather glad of it, for he's too good for his own comfort as it is. I should pity him if he entered the ministry."

His companion laughed coarsely. "Better ask him down here for a while, Hal. We'd soon take the extra goodness out of him."

Harold wasn't so sure of that, but he didn't say anything to the contrary. It might have

touched him a little had he known of the patient and undoubting faith with which his friend waited for his letter.

At last, after many weeks of silence, Allan wrote again. Just a note of inquiry.

It came to him just a little after Lily's piteous question, "What makes them talk so about my brother?"

It found Harold in a very tender mood.

"I'll answer that, my good friend," he soliloquized, as he refolded it. "You are worth all these new fellows. I ought to be ashamed of dropping you as I did. But I'll make up for it after this."

The next day he left home, and in the excitement and novelty of his new position, forgot the note for days. A week after he was domiciled in his rooms in the college grounds, he began a reply. He was interrupted by callers. He was already popular, and to-day he threw aside his pen with ready cordiality to entertain the young men who had sought him. The next morning

he used the half-finished note to light his cigar, and all thought of his friend seemed to vanish amid the wreaths of smoke that he idly watched as they rose in the air.

Allan, discouraged, did not write again. At rare intervals he heard some chance mention of Harold. Such allusions were always of a nature to pain him. Hints of his popularity among the most dissipated of the students; of his reckless expenditure; of his low standing in his class; all showed that he was again in evil courses, and going down rapidly.

"If I could help him," Allan said to his mother one day, just after hearing some such report as this, "I wouldn't value any effort. Dear Hal! he is too good to be lost in this way."

"Why don't you write to him again?"

"I think I will. But he never answers me of late."

Still, the attempt was made. The letter was as fruitless as its predecessors.

Mr. Lawton received discouraging accounts

from the College President. He spoke highly of Harold's intellectual ability, and his generous impulsive kindness of heart. But he was so prone to follow others into evil! The gentleman confessed that he entertained grave doubts of his remaining there during the year with either credit or benefit to himself.

Mr. Lawton did not show these letters to his wife, but to his son he wrote plainly.

"If I hear of your going wrong again I shall have you come home," he wrote at length. "It has been my ambition to see you a useful, honored member of society; with what mad infatuation you are thwarting all my wishes! I am disappointed in you, my son." This warning, by some accident, never reached Harold.

He wrote as carefully as possible to his parents. He was fast learning concealment, and they would not have inferred, from his letters, that dissipation, and not study, was the business of his days.

CHAPTER XII.

AT LAST.

MR. WARREN sat in his study busy upon a sermon, when a gentle knock at the door attracted his attention. He rose to admit the caller.

"Why, Bertie, my child! I am very glad to see you." He grasped her hand warmly.

"You see I avail myself of your invitation to come. You call on us so seldom, and I have missed you so."

He had placed a chair for her in the warm corner by the open grate, glancing at her with some anxiety meanwhile; for it was the opinion of many among her friends that Bertie was very delicate since her fearful sickness, and the minister had more than once

heard it hinted that she would never regain her old strength.

But her face was very bright, almost rosy to-day. And there was such a restful expression in her eyes as it gave him joy to behold.

"And how does the cold weather affect you, Bertie? I have thought of you many times when the rest of us have been so chilled by these frosty winds; and Mrs. Warren has been very solicitous about your welfare."

"Oh, I am gaining every day. I am so well now. Why, it seems just like old times, when I was always strong!"

"That is good news. Then I suppose very soon we shall hear of your flitting away to some of the absent friends. Isn't that your intention?"

"Yes. In a few weeks I am going to Pennsylvania to visit an old school-friend, Miss Carrington."

"Carrington! I think you have never named

her to me. Is she as pleasing as Miss Carrol?"

Bertie hesitated.

"She is very different from Louise. Perhaps she would not impress a stranger as favorably, but she is a noble girl. I don't know, really. I love them both so much that I am not prepared to pass judgment upon either."

"I think Miss Carrol a girl of unusual strength of character. I rarely see in one so young so many indications of power."

"Well, I just begun to find that out when she was here. At school, we loved Louise for being so sunny and winning; but I have been learning since that she is more substantial than I used to think.

"She is at work bravely this year, trying, I gleaned from some chance words, to send her younger sister to school. Her father is not able to help them much, and Louise tries to do her best for the family. It must be a hard life for her, mirthful as she is.

And that first made me think that perhaps she didn't always show the best part of her nature. So I followed my clue till I found out many things which surprised me.

"I believe she is thoroughly in earnest. I picture for her a noble, energetic Christian life. She would be a true laborer in the Lord's vineyard if she but consecrated herself to his service. And I am very confident, from some things I heard her say, that she is already nearer the kingdom than she dreams."

Bertie's fingers were interlacing nervously. At any other time she would have been happy to hear such words spoken of her friend. But to-day she came for something else. Couldn't her pastor see that she had an errand?

Perhaps he was more discerning than she thought. At all events, he ceased speaking at length, and left her to break the silence.

"Mr. Warren," she began, a little tremulously, "you left me to myself, you know. But you said if I wished to come here, you

would be glad to see me. It has been a good while since then. And now I believe — I am quite sure — that I have good news to tell you."

She looked so like her mother as she spoke, Mr. Warren's thoughts went back a score of years, then returned to the present with a thrill of joy that, in the love and mercy of our Lord, there are no times or seasons save a blessed, never-ending *now*.

So absorbed was he with the thought that he made no reply to her words; and she went on.

"I felt discouraged many times after that day. To tell the truth, I almost blamed you, now and then, for leaving me so to myself. I didn't want to trouble papa, as I knew it would trouble him, so I groped my way alone in the dark. I felt, after awhile, as if I must get into the daylight again, and I just prayed my way out. I have been so happy of late. Christ seems so near, and so very dear to me."

Her cheeks were flushed. She paused, waiting for words of comprehension and sympathy.

"Bertie," her pastor said at length, "do you know what you have done for me? I was writing a Thanksgiving sermon when you came in. I had been reviewing the past year in my mind, and was feeling a little discouraged that in many respects the harvest was so scanty. But, my child, your words have just filled my heart with thanksgiving. I can write the grateful thoughts now."

"I knew you would be glad. I haven't told any one else, except papa."

"*Glad*, Bertie! If you knew how my heart ached for you during that long sickness, and afterward when I feared you were blind to the lesson of it, you would understand *how* glad. If I have said less to you, it has been from no lack of interest."

"No, sir; I never really thought that. I knew you had prayed very faithfully for me. Since I have learned to pray in earnest for my-

self, I have known more how much you were doing."

"A Christian, Bertie! a Christian! Dear child, you have claimed the dearest name, the best title the earth holds. I am at rest about you. You won't find it all easy work, even now; but there will always be encouragement hereafter, even in your failures. Don't lose the first freshness of your Christian love. Keep very near to Christ, and you will be led and comforted."

"I will try;" very softly.

"How different this is from our last talk on this subject. It rebukes me, Bertie, for my want of faith. I might have *known* that prayers so earnestly uttered by dying lips for you, the child so soon to be left motherless, would be answered."

"Do you know," Bertie made answer, "that of late I have thought more about my mother than ever before? She seems nearer to me."

"Yea, verily, —

'One family we dwell in Him,
One church, above, beneath,
But now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death.'

"It grows very narrow, Bertie, when we realize that whether on one side or the other, we are His. I can understand the change in your feelings. Your mother's Lord is yours too. You are sure that when a few short years are past you can see her in that blissful home whither she has preceded you — your dear young mother! She was no older than you are now, and she was so willing to go."

Their talk drifted into tender words of her. Bertie listened eagerly to all Mr. Warren had to say, for at home her mother's name was rarely spoken. Mr. Arnold never mentioned her, even to his child. So awful had been the break in his life when she went out of it, so strong still was his sense of loss and desolation, that he kept all memory of her down in the depths wherein only silence reigneth.

But Bertie resolved very tenderly, that in the

strength of her new hope she would venture to speak to him of their lost one. She felt that the time had come when she should hear of her. She was not willing to feel so ignorant of the parent who was waiting for her in the new home.

After she had gone, Mr. Warren resumed his writing. He seemed inspired with glowing thoughts, and the sermon preached a few days later to a large congregation, brought the quick tears to many eyes. Coming straight from his own heart, warmed and kindled as it was by the joy of Bertie's story, it went to theirs, quickening the fires of Christian thankfulness and patient faith in many a heart where they had seemed almost dormant.

In a short time Bertie was able to make the long-contemplated visit to Wilton.

"My darling," you are sweeter than ever," Margaret exclaimed rapturously as she greeted her.

She laughed a little at the childish curls,

and then her face grew sober, remembering when they were shortened and why.

We must not stop for any details of the visit, which lasted till the middle of January, and then, true to her promise, Margaret accompanied her friend home.

Bertie won golden opinions from Nettie Carrington, who declared in confidence to her mother, that she had "just the most beautiful face" she ever saw. Just such a face as realized her idea of the Madonna.

Mrs. Carrington was hardly disposed to check her child's enthusiasm, for she too noticed the unwonted purity of Bertie's countenance, and was not unconscious of the beauty of her daily life. She saw with what care she watched over all her words and actions; how vigilantly she guarded against evil speaking, or harsh, uncharitable words that could give pain to others; how constantly careful she was to avoid anything irreverent or heartless; and she honored the young girl for the consistent Christian

principle which already began to show itself as the ruling power of her life.

Dr. Carrington was pleased with her also, but, contrasting the two, he found no occasion to be dissatisfied with Margaret. He was always proud and happy when he realized how richly stored was her mind. And he admired the haughty manner that ofttimes led him to address her as Queen Margaret.

As to Margaret herself, she was not one whit disappointed in this renewal of old friendship. She found Bertie just as entirely suited to her taste as ever. But, from many things, she knew that however perfect their mutual love might be, there was a gulf between them.

She realized it, when, having sought their room at night, Bertie would open her little Bible and read such a long time, with that rapt, happy expression upon her face; when she would kneel in prayer, and rise afterward with moist eyes, but a still brighter smile.

After that, no matter how tenderly her friend's arm was clasped about her neck, Margaret felt that she was so far from her! She would go to sleep heavy-hearted.

Of Bertie's impressions of her old-time schoolmate we can find the best record in one of her letters to her father.

"You wish to know," she wrote, "whether I am disappointed in Margaret, upon seeing her after more than a year's absence. I think I am not. She is as dear to me as ever: as much my admiration as when I saw her last.

"I love them all. They are making me very happy here; and I can easily see where Margaret gets her pure ideas of life and her generous sympathies. Her mother is one of the noblest women I ever met. In her I recognize many of the same traits that won my heart in the daughter.

"But, papa, sometimes I feel that no friendship can be taken up just exactly as we left

it. That, probably, is natural and to be expected. I know that ours, in all respects, is not what it was eighteen months ago. But I am persuaded that we can make it an infinitely richer, stronger and more beautiful one.

"Sometimes I think Margaret has changed a good deal. Then I remember that I, no doubt, seem different to her also. We love each other dearly, but, papa — I would say this to no one but yourself — strong and self-reliant as she is, it comes to me sometimes with the force of certainty that Margaret has been through some bitter struggle, some hard conflict, and has been defeated."

The two girls spent nearly all of the winter together. When, toward spring, Margaret bade her friend good-by "for a few months," as she said smilingly, neither of them dreamed that they might not meet again till it should be written years instead.

Bertie commenced her active Christian life

in earnest now. With renewed health and added experience she was ready to prove her faith by works and words. Her father watched her from day to day with an element of reverence mingling, more and more, with his love.

She had been received into the Church, and now, in the Sunday-school, and in every good enterprise, she found congenial employment.

Late in the spring she received a letter from her cousin Mabel, who lived near Harold Lawton.

"Do you know, Bertie," she asked, "how shockingly your old classmate is behaving? I think it's perfectly scandalous. I used to think Hal was just splendid; but now I am almost ashamed to be seen speaking to him. He has been suspended from college, but I guess he might as well have been expelled, for he is too dissipated to be allowed to remain, even if he returns."

The letter contained other items of interest,

but this touched Bertie too deeply for her to enjoy any of the comical paragraphs that followed.

Was Harold sinking so low? She didn't forget him after that in a single nightly prayer. It was all she could do for him; and she was faithful in this.

CHAPTER XIII.

GOING TO BATTLE.

IT was April. The sun began to shine warmly in at the windows of the farmhouse among the hills. Allan was ready to begin another summer's work. He had been engaged in teaching during the winter, and had been so fortunate as to secure the assistance of the village pastor in pursuing his own studies.

It seemed to him all the time that he was just to make the most of his present life with its limited opportunities, and then be ready for something higher when it came.

This morning he felt unusually happy. Something of the freshness seemed to enter his heart. His mother, sitting at the window, heard him singing at his work.

Little Charlie Deane, on his way home from the post-office, stopped to leave their letters. Mrs. Grantley laid down her knitting as he came in.

"Thank you, Charlie. I've been hoping to get the papers this morning." She glanced down the columns, reading a few lines here and there — local items, more or less interesting. Her eyes rested at length on the words "War News." "*Good* news, I hope," she thought as she began to read.

Five minutes later she glanced up from the paper.

How very cosy and pleasant the kitchen looked! The old clock ticked in its slow, monotonous fashion; pussy was asleep upon the hearth; Allan's books piled upon the desk in the corner suggesting the quiet evening hour when she could watch his curly head bending over them; the flower-stand — it had been hard work to preserve its treasures during the severe winter — beginning to look greenly beautiful as the leaves and

hints of blossoms grew apace. That, too, was one of Allan's fancies.

She saw him at work in the yard, making a trellis for her pet rose-bush, mindful of a chance word she had given utterance to a few days before.

Everywhere she could see some proof of the tender thoughtfulness that never failed her. But, was she sinning, day after day, in keeping him here? She knew that he so yearned to go. He had told her in their long talks months ago how gladly he would join the army, save for her. And she had begged him to stay. She leaned her head against the window-sill and thought of it.

Another terrible defeat. Precious lives given freely, generously. Young hopes quenched, and loving hearts at home darkened with sorrow. And she was unscathed. Her offering had been withheld as too costly, too dear to be given. Now, more men were called for. Was not her duty plain? Too long, already, had she weakly

clung to her boy. She would no longer stand in his way. He should trace his honorable record as his father would have done.

What if the pleasant home room did lose its sunshine? She must be strong to endure. She went to the door.

"Allan, come here a moment!" She did not know how pale her face showed, standing there in the sunshine. But he noticed it, and hastened a little therefor.

"What is it, little mother?" as he stepped upon the porch.

"You know Pickering wants to take the farm this year as he used to. Have you any thoughts about letting him come?" She, watching his face furtively, noticed the momentary eager flush that died away again into a look of unusual gravity.

"No; not really. I have thought *about* it, certainly. But, considering all things, I have decided not to employ him."

"Well, Allan," she had intended to say it

very calmly, but the tears came unbidden, "there are more men needed in the service, I find by the morning paper. And I've been thinking that if you wish to go as much as ever, I — am — willing."

"O, mother!" Both glanced involuntarily toward the South. Far as the eye could reach, so calm was all the landscape, so fair the blue sky overhead, it seemed but the visible expression of peace. It seemed strange that so many were going out into the spring beauty and warmth of verdure to find naught but graves.

Allan drew a long, deep breath. "Why, mother, it's the greatest wish I've cherished for a whole year! And to think that you are willing!" They didn't say much about it. Neither felt like doing so.

But that day Allan rode away to the village and made the first necessary arrangements.

"I am going to get up a company, mother,"

he said that night, after he came home. "Do you know how different it all seems to me now? I shall not be afraid to look in the papers any more. I have not wanted to know much about it of late, feeling that I was an idler outside the ranks."

There was much to be done in the few weeks that elapsed before his going. He made all possible arrangements for his mother's comfort; and she, deep as was the tender sadness that mingled with all her preparations, was not without comfort. The compensation came even amidst the first lonely pain. She was not standing between her boy and his duty.

It came at last — all too soon — and he was gone. She could but sit down in her great loneliness and pray for him.

But frequent and cheering came his letters. And when she had read and re-read them, there were generally kindly messages to be conveyed to other mothers, wives, or sisters,

who had loved ones in his company. At first, only words of remembrance and good cheer. But by and by, as he went into the thickest of the struggle, and stood in the ranks before the terrible battle-fires, she had other work to do. It was her part to go into many a home to explain the sad tidings that were so cruelly brief in the daily papers; her privilege to add to the one printed word "Killed" the story of a willing departure, and to gild the darkness with the few rays of hope that would never cease to be cherished.

The young captain whom all his soldiers loved, received — ah, how often! — the last words for home-friends from lips that grew cold and speechless even with their utterance.

Many a little keepsake, guarding a story known, it may be, unto but two hearts, was entrusted to him to be returned with dying words of love to the giver.

And Allan, faithfully attending to all these sacred trusts, came, at length, to speak often

in his letters to his mother of the possibility of his going too.

"Whatever happens, I want you to know," he said in one of his letters, "that I have often thought I might be appointed unto death. And, my dear mother, should I be taken suddenly, and no good-by words could ever come to you, remember that you need none to assure you that your boy remembered you most and always."

She shed many a tear over such words as these, but was mindful, too, of her exceeding cause for thankfulness. It mattered not how sudden the call, or how obscure the unknown Southern grave that might be his, her son would know no other fate than, dying, to sleep in Jesus.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARTING.

"MY wife, oh, why did you not tell me sooner!" Dr. Carrington's strong frame quivered with the agony he was striving, for her sake, to repress.

"I did not wish to alarm you needlessly. When the suspicion first came to me that my late weariness and languor were but symptoms of a disease for which there was no cure, my whole soul cried out against it. I could not leave you and my children!

"This was during the week you were at the West. Had you been at home, I must have told you then. When I grew a little calmer, I shut myself in the office for one entire day, and studied concerning this disease. Then I was *sure*.

"I would not tell you any reason for my staying so much in my room, lest your suspicions should be aroused; and I wanted to conquer myself first, and then I could comfort you."

During the ensuing hour, Dr. Carrington kept down all feeling as best he could, and tried to be only the clear-minded physician.

When all his questions had been answered, he, too, was *sure*. Words of mine would fail to express the husband's agony of despair, but the habit of over twenty years was strong enough to lend him control even now.

His wife's comfort had always been his first consideration. Now, he determinately talked on about her present welfare; was even fastidious about the position of the curtain, lest a ray of sunlight should fall across her eyes; asked her what books he should bring her, and finally kissed her and went away, as he had done every morning for so many years.

O, God! there would be weeks enough to

dwell upon his suffering when he could do nothing for her. Now, he would forget himself in so far as it was possible, and minister to the sweet soúl whose days on earth were numbered.

How many times during their married life they had talked of this beautiful "new home" of which their loving earth-home seemed so fitting a symbol. They had not feared the transition from one to the other, but in all their imaginings they had been *together*. Surely, it had never occurred to either of them that she would be called to leave him. He had many times thought pityingly of her loneliness when his busy life should wear itself out, and she be left a widow. But that she, with her still youthful face and girlish freshness, should be the one to go! It was strange, strange!

He guarded all his words. She didn't know how he yearned to clasp her in his arms, and give vent in bitter weeping to the agony at his heart. He talked to her very tenderly,

but hopefully, and then left her, calling Margaret to sit with her.

The young girl, unused to sickness as she was, saw nothing unusual in her mother's face.

It was a peaceful day for them at home. The doctor was absent from dinner, but that was no unusual thing, and the girls didn't know that he had tasted nothing, when, his daily calls ended, after another brief visit to his wife's room, he went out for a ride.

He came home just at dusk, having decided but one thing in all that confused rush of feeling: he must tell his children of their mother's danger, and prepare them to be very calm when in her presence.

He could not do it that night. He tried to, but it seemed too cruel. How could he look into those young smiling faces turned toward him, and smite all the brightness out of them? Then their mother seemed so comfortable!

She had come down into the sitting-room,

and he found her lying upon the lounge, the light of the sunset upon her, and all the wonted gladness in her voice.

He was even gentler than common to Nettie that night. "Poor children! they shall have this one happy evening. To-morrow I must tell them," he thought.

And to-morrow he did tell them. His own grief was old to him now, so long seemed the twenty-four hours that had passed since that talk with his wife, and he could speak more calmly.

He was prepared for Nettie's passionate sobs, and Margaret's one anguished exclamation. He didn't forget that he, their father, must try to help and strengthen them. And the first relief for his own heavy pain came when he strove to show to them the comfort which even this grief surely held.

After that the time was very brief. A few weeks, a few anxious days, then the end.

These few words told the story. But how

much those weeks held! The "anxious days" — do any of you know what they mean?

And "the end," which, after all, is not an end, but a beginning; I cannot say much of that. It came, and they endured.

During that time, the mother had a few precious talks with her children. Little Nettie, after the first burst of feeling, seemed to find peace and strength. She didn't try to forget the grief, that was real and heavy, but the Saviour helped her bear it.

Mrs. Carrington saw gladly that her little girl was being helped.

Margaret took the sorrow differently.

"Can't you be willing, my daughter?" her mother said to her one day, at the close of an hour's earnest conversation. And the answer that saddened her was, "Mother, you are dearer to me than any one else in all the world. Would to God that I could go with you! But when I think of your leaving me here, it is all darkness and despair."

The days were, for the most part, free from suffering. Dr. Carrington often found his wife with a book in her hands, occasionally with paper and pencil, though these she laid aside when she heard him coming, and a fresh look upon her face that would almost have made him hope, only that he *knew*.

When the death-angel came, it was, as ever, at the hour when least expected. She had seemed unwontedly strong during the day, talking to Margaret and Nettie of the things that seemed of most interest to them, giving them little hints of advice, which afterward they would remember, and joining, with almost her own strength, in one or two hymns that the girls sang just before sunset when they were waiting supper for their father to come home. None of them would ever forget just how she looked at the table that night.

Margaret had woven a few early rose-buds in her hair. These, with the fleecy white shawl she wore, gave her the look of having come

into the summer. And so she had; a warmer, more beautiful summer than they were to see. Her husband helped her into the parlor after supper, and, as she leaned back in her chair, kissed her lips fondly, the shadow seeming, for the moment, to lighten and rise from his heart.

Ten minutes later he was recalled to the room by the one word "Father!" in a voice he scarcely recognized as Margaret's. He went in, to find his children sobbing in uncontrollable anguish, and to see, on the face which had embodied his life's sunshine, a strange, new smile.

She had caught the angelic welcome before she passed away.

Very sudden, very quiet, had been the departure. Perhaps she herself scarcely knew she was dying till she woke to the bliss of heaven.

Nettie, coming into the room, had spoken to her, and receiving no answer, had gone to her

and taken her hand. The icy coldness of it told her the bitter truth.

. . . . . .

Days later they found in her writing-desk letters addressed to each of them. The loving heart knew that there might be no time for any spoken good-bys, so she had pencilled tender, farewell words to them all.

The contents of her husband's letter no one but himself ever knew.

Little Nettie read hers with mingled sobs and smiles.

Margaret's we will give, in part:

"Upon you, my daughter, this blow will fall very heavily. I want you to know, darling, that there will be no bitter thought, no anguished hour when life will seem almost too lonely too endure, that your mother did not think of and comprehend. Perhaps I may be permitted to help you. That is as God wills. But now, while I can, I will say a few words that *must* comfort you every time you read them. I am willing to go. That is worth so much. This life, dear, is but the merest beginning; as brief and crude compared to the one upon which I am so soon to enter, as the alphabet is to the whole broad range of literature. Do not grieve, Margaret, that I am going on from this simple page to

nobler reading. The years before my dear ones can come to me will be very brief. Your father will grieve very bitterly, but he has the best comfort; after a little he will remember to lean on that. And Nettie's faith will help her. For you, my darling, whose warm, loving heart has leaned only upon earthly stays, I feel the deepest pity. God grant that you may learn, in loving the memory of your mother, to worship the Master who has called her. Margaret, when you read these words, let them come to you as my last wish. Seek the Saviour. He will love you even better than your mother does. He will help you shape this passionate, wayward life of yours into beauty and holiness. You have been a very precious child to me. In no filial duty have you been remiss, but always, in all things, one of my best blessings. And as I write these words, I feel as if the angels whispered it — a sweet assurance that my child will come soon into the knowledge of Christ's saving love."

How strangely came back to the reader's mind those other words of her mother's, uttered almost a year ago. "If you cry out against the emptiness of your life, blame Him not if He fills it in His own way."

She had thus "cried out;" she had rejected Him, and now He had indeed taken away from her that to which she most clung, and she must learn to walk alone.

What prosperity had failed to do, this grief and the heartbreak of it accomplished. After the first rebellious bitterness of her pain had passed away, Margaret began to turn her thoughts to the heaven which held her mother, and the Lord who had taken her unto Himself.

And when, as in the lengthening summer twilight she sought that precious grave, and laid her fresh flowers upon it, she could say at last, "*Even though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.*"

In Margaret's blank-book, under this same date, was copied the following poem:

"Arise, and seek some height to gain
From life's dark lesson day by day,
Nor just rehearse its peace and pain—
A wearied actor at the play.

"Nor grieve that will so much transcends
Thy feeble powers, but in content
Do what thou canst, and leave the ends
And issues with the Omnipotent.

"Arise, my friend, and go about
Thy darkened house with cheerful feet;

Yield not one jot to fear nor doubt,
But, baffled, broken, still repeat:

"'Tis mine to work, and not to win;
The soul must wait to have her wings;
Even time is but a landmark in
The great eternity of things.

"Is it so much that thou below,
O heart, shouldst fail of thy desire,
When death, as we believe and know,
Is but a call to come up higher."

CHAPTER XV.

COMING INTO THE CHURCH.

IT was the first Sabbath in July.

Upon that day the church of which Dr. Carrington and Nettie were members, was to celebrate the Saviour's dying love.

Upon that day, also, Margaret was to unite herself with the people of God by those solemn tender vows that neither life nor death can annul.

She had learned to love her Saviour, and in the strong light which this new feeling cast upon her life, she remembered all the olden bitterness and rebellion. She saw how she had been led through sunlight and down pleasant slopes to find Him at last amid the shadows.

Now she was willing, nay, eager, to make

public profession of her new faith. She longed now to show herself unto the world as His disciple.

She sat in her own room, this bright — to her — twice-hallowed Sabbath morning. It lacked an hour yet of time for service, and she had come up here for quiet thought and reading. She sat now with her Bible in her hand, but with eyes wandering over the distant hills. Their grandeur suited her to-day.

This one day would stand out in memory, clear and well-defined; raised above all the ordinary days that followed or preceded it, as the one on which she gave herself, all that she was or might become, to Him who had loved her and given himself for her.

"Or might become!" This was the thought about which Margaret's heart busied itself. Enough of sin, of wrong, of bitterness had there been in the old life! *But, behold, all things are new.* And in this new life, with its new desires, hopes and purposes, and, above

all, the Help that she had only newly accepted, what might she not become?

Ambitious, Margaret would always be. But this was an ambition that longed to attain, only that all might be laid at the feet of Christ.

There was no hesitation; no thought of the people around her as she left her father and Nettie to join those who were to be received into the church.

The earnest, intent eyes never wavered in their steadfast gaze, any more than her thoughts wandered from the words that were being spoken. She might have been a queen bowing her head to receive her crown, so lifted above all common concerns did she seem. And, indeed, why not? Child of God! daughter of the King! is she not crowned, emblematic of an inheritance that *this world can neither give nor take away.*

A moment she lingered after the prayer, her head bowed The sunlight stole in softly through the thick-leaved trees, and lay, in tender bene-

diction, on the brown hair and pure womanly forehead.

It was a scene to be carried in her father's heart through all the coming years. His beautiful, beloved daughter! That she had always been, but to-day she seemed even more than that. Now, she was the disciple of his Lord, his own home companion in all good work and brave endeavor. He felt less cruelly alone, as she came back to him, than in the past dreary weeks.

Margaret looked out through the open window toward the shaded hill near the church where lay the garden of their dead. Her eyes rested on a slender marble cross, gleaming whitely in the distance, till gradually it faded from her dimming vision. One thought had been present with her all the morning:

"My blessed mother! does she know that her child has come home at last?" The tender thought seemed like the echo of heavenly music.

A hymn was given out and sung, the organ

giving it solemn undertone of praise. She bowed her head and listened.

"Nearer, my God to thee,
Nearer to thee,
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me."

That should be her daily prayer. Nearer to Him through whatever of suffering, or loss, or discouragement He chose to send. She realized that she stood to-day upon a mountain-summit of christian exaltation, and that the valleys of humiliation and despondency might yet have to be travelled, but she could look upward with entire faith, and say:

"I know not the way I am going,
But well do I know my Guide."

Standing again in her room, after the quiet walk home, Margaret spoke slowly and deliberately.

"Once, in this same room, I said 'I will not!' To-day I say it again, but with a world-wide difference in meaning. God helping me, *I will*

not let this first Christian joy grow dim; this first consecration be dishonored in my payment of the vow. I am no longer my own. I have been 'bought with a price,' and such a price."

"O Christ, I promise all this, but Thou, only Thou canst help me to perform. Thine I am, wilt not Thou undertake for me, that when heart shall falter and strength utterly fail, I may yet realize that thy strength can be made perfect even in my weakness?"

I think Margaret's mother will fear no more for the child who is in such safe keeping.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT THE FLOWERS SAID.

LOUISE CARROL had entered upon her second year in the Seminary. Her days, since she went back from that pleasant rest at Lanesville, had been, almost without exception, busy ones. Hard at work in school for five days, she often sighed wearily on Saturday morning, in a vain longing for just that one day in which to please herself.

But duty seemed to point another way. She was working energetically to enable Bessie to attend school at Merrivale, and it seemed that this summer her wishes would be fulfilled.

She was still using her knowledge of music as a help. And her Saturdays were given wholly to her scholars.

Lousie had, perhaps, changed more since her school-days than either of her friends in personal appearance, at least. The olden merry *insouciance* of her manner seemed merged in quiet dignity; the brown eyes showed a more earnest expression; the roses upon her cheeks had paled a little in all those working months, and her voice missed a touch of its former laughing ring.

But she had gained much more than she had lost. Her face bore traces of a far richer experience, and a more beautiful living. Since the last winter she had striven to do her work as unto the Lord, and that spirit entering into her heart had found translation in her face.

But despite her faith and resolute effort, there were many discouraging days for her. At the close of one of them, one of the first oppressively warm days of summer, too, when any exertion seemed painful, and ordinary duties too difficult to perform, she remained

in the schoolroom for an hour after the others had gone.

Before her lay a huge pile of uncorrected papers: French themes and compositions, also several egregiously faulty pages of Etymology, the early efforts of a class of boys who tried her patience sorely.

It was a day when everything had gone wrong. Missed lessons, inattention and listlessness had seemed bad enough, but, aside from these, there had been one or two instances of manifestly intentional unkindness, which was but a poor return for her hard work and untiring assistance. And Louise, who had succeeded in keeping outwardly calm till she could be alone, was sobbing now in weary discouragement.

The fear had been often in her mind of late, that her strength was failing a little. And now a violent headache brought it forcibly to her attention, that perhaps she would be compelled to take a rest from school.

"Twenty-four weeks more," she said, cheering herself up with thinking how soon the time would pass. But somehow, so utterly exhausted was she, her tears did not cease to flow, and she bowed her head upon the desk in front of her, and cried like a child.

These "clouds in her sky" were a part of her own private experience. When she went home, once during each term and for her vacations, she had nothing to tell the home-folks but the pleasant part of her daily life.

There was more unselfish heroism in this than may at first appear, for it would have been a great comfort to tell her mother some of her trials. Even Bessie's vehement girlish sympathy would have been very good to have. But what would be the use?

Almost unconsciously, Louise was making her own happiness subservient to their welfare. And though for a time she might get weary and find many hard things in her way, the reward for her loving endeavor would be certain.

After a while she grew calmer, and raising her head, looked about the room. The sun was sinking from sight, sending a few last rays athwart the desks and down the aisles. The papers before her didn't look quite as hopeless as they had done an hour ago, and with a little half-pitying smile at herself, she began her work of correcting.

One, two, three, four, five she had finished and laid aside. Thirty-seven more. Could she look them all over before it grew too dark to see? She took up the package, and, carrying her chair to the window where the light was brightest, went on with her work.

"Miss Carrol!"

So noiseless had been the footsteps upon the floor, that Louise had been unconscious of any presence save her own in the darkening room, till she heard her name. She looked up to meet the eyes of Alice Huntress, one of the young ladies whose perversity that day had been, in part, the cause of her tears.

"I brought you in some flowers, if you will accept them."

She held in her hand a beautiful bouquet. June roses, red and white, and half-opened buds here and there, beautiful and tender; delicate sprays of green leaves; purple pansies; and the glorious beauty of the passion-flower. Louise smiled brightly as she took them, and looked up from them to speak her thanks.

"You are very thoughtful, Alice."

The young girl hesitated as she turned to go.

"Miss Carrol"—her eyes filled—"I did not mean to be rude to you this afternoon. I got discouraged and tired, and I didn't realize how I was going to speak. Please forgive me," her irresolute little hand coming out to meet Louise's.

"I love you, Miss Carrol. You shall not have occasion to chide me again."

Her teacher's warm kiss was her best answer.

"It's all past, Allie. Your flowers will do me good. And now, good-night!"

How cheerful her voice sounded. As she turned again to her task it seemed only pleasant work. At last, the exercises were all corrected, and, putting them in her desk, she made ready to leave the schoolroom. Just then, as she stood a moment, her face bent down over the flowers in her hand, another person entered the room, this time not noiselessly, but with a firm, decided step.

Louise looked up, a little startled.

"Ah, Miss Carrol. You are rather late to-night in leaving."

It was Mr. Brookes, one of the trustees of the school, who had come in to make some slight investigation concerning faulty ventilation.

"Yes, sir; I have been unusually busy," was her answer.

The gentleman, a rather dignified-looking personage of perhaps thirty-five years, looked at her a little curiously. Perhaps he saw the traces of tears upon her face. Perhaps he was thinking that it was far paler than when he

had seen her during previous terms. He made no comment, but with a business-like air took up the papers she had been examining, and surveyed them critically.

"Do you enjoy this sort of work — the looking over such specimens as that, for instance?"

He held up one of the most faulty.

"Moderately. But of course some things are not quite pleasant. I like to find such ones as this;" and she passed Alice Huntress' neatly-written theme.

They chatted a little while about school and kindred topics. Then Louise put on her hat.

"Wait for me five minutes, will you not, Miss Carrol? My horse is at the door, and I will take you home."

She sat down until he was ready to go. As they went down the steps and out to the carriage, she heard the village clock strike six.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed with a sudden, irrepressible sigh; "how soon it will be nine o'clock again!"

"And are you so tired?"

He smiled down at her pityingly.

"Sometimes I think I am, but for the most part I scold myself for lacking energy."

Mr. Brookes, being naturally rather an absent-minded man, made no reply. He was thinking, as she looked up, what a very pretty face it was, and noticing, for he was somewhat of a critic in such matters, that the hat above it was of not the most recent fashion, besides being decidedly simple; also, that Miss Carrol's dress was of plain material and almost void of trimming.

A little wonder came into his mind just then. The young lady was receiving a liberal salary. She surely could afford to dress a little more fashionably if she chose. There must be some reason for her economy.

He roused himself from these thoughts to listen to her eager comments on the scenery, for, with a kindly wish to give her pleasure, he had driven down the river-road, thus pro-

longing the ride and giving her a glimpse of the greenness and beauty she saw all too seldom.

"You are an enthusiastic little creature," he thought to himself, but his audible answer was a very quiet "Yes; it is very beautiful hereabouts. It is more than that to me, for I have known and loved the place from my boyhood."

As he assisted her from the carriage at the door of her boarding-place, Mrs. Green, her landlady, peered curiously from the window.

"Well, I declare!" she ejaculated to her worthy husband. "If that isn't the queerest! Here's Miss Carrol riding home with Arthur Brookes. Did you ever? Why, I've known him this twenty years, and I never seed him riding out with a young lady before."

Mr. Green "rather guessed Miss Carrol was as good as Arthur Brookes, for all his grand ways." Just then Louise opened the door, putting a stop to their surprised comments.

"Am I very late?" she questioned brightly.

"Don't scold me, please. I'll do better to-morrow night."

"Doubt if you could," said Mr. Green in facetious undertone. "Most of the young ladies would say you had done very well this time."

Louise was accustomed to his joking, but somehow it didn't strike her quite pleasantly this time. Mr. Brookes seemed to her so grand and dignified, so altogether superior to these people, that she did not like even a jesting hint in reference to him.

After drinking a cup of tea and listening patiently to "auntie" Green's expostulations at her lack of appetite, she went up-stairs to her room. Filling a little vase with fresh water, she placed her flowers in it. Then, putting on a cool, loose wrapper, she took a book, and, sitting down in an easy-chair by the window, began to read. But the tempting, dainty rose perfume came between her and the page before her. She drew the vase toward her, touching the flowers almost caressingly. A warm, tender

thought of Alice's demeanor, and the words with which she gave them, came into her mind. After all, it was ungrateful and faithless for her to feel so discouraged as she had done that day. The flowers should teach her patience. She took out one, a clear white rose, whose every petal seemed to whisper of rest and purity, and thought as she looked at it: "Last summer when the roses came I was here in this same house, working as I am working now, in school. Is there any difference between that June and this? Let me think. Then, Bertie was sick, and that made me miserable. Papa was in trouble about his business, and I knew they were all sad at home. Now, Bertie is well, and radiantly happy; the store is flourishing, and I — just myself — am almost ready to send Bessie to Merrivale. And that is what I have worked for so long.

"And I am so much happier, too, than I was then. I am not stumbling along blindly any longer." The rose sparkled for a moment

as with a fresh dew-drop, her face beaming over it.

"Oh, this is a better summer — a *better* summer!"

Such beautiful resting thoughts the flowers gave her. The mute, unknowing blossoms had yet a thousand voices of cheer.

Alice Huntress little dreamed, when, with loving penitence she arranged the slight gift, that its mission would be so sweet.

So we never know, in this world, how much the little kindly deeds may accomplish. This we do know; they can do no harm. We are sure of that. And if we never forget to perform them when opportunity offers, we may find sometime that we have "builded better than we knew."

CHAPTER XVII.

HELPED.

"I WANT you to come home, Harold," Mr. Lawton wrote to his son near the close of the summer term at college. Such reports of Harold's conduct had reached him as made him determined to recall him.

The young man seemed to have lost all sense of his degradation, and to really enjoy the company which a year before he only tolerated. When he read his father's letter, containing this brief, imperative summons, he was angrily disappointed. To be sure, he wasn't leaving much, but in his present state of mind that was no important consideration.

He knew that he was a trial to professors and tutors, but, and that is one of the

almost unfailing traits of a willful, dissipated student, he had grown to look upon them as fault-finding and malicious.

He was surrounded by a small circle of young men whose habits were similar to his own, and he was averse to leaving them. But he knew his father's commands must be obeyed. So, seeking the president, he handed him the letter, with a dogged sort of effrontery.

"There is my explanation," he said, as the gentleman finished reading it. "So you will understand why I leave to-night."

"Lawton, I regret exceedingly that your conduct has compelled such a measure as this on your father's part. I have endeavored, in every way, to help you in the path of duty. It pains me that you are so weak and foolish."

Harold showed, for the moment, a gleam of his old warm frankness.

"I am sorry," he began; then his tone changed. "I suppose I am one of the worst

fellows in the world. At any rate, you all seem to think so. Good morning!" with mocking indifference. He strode away, heedless of the sad look that President Small's face wore. His conscience told him that this man had striven to be a true Christian friend to him, but he would not listen to its whisperings. He made his preparations for going away, and bidding his companions good-by, took the next train for home, leaving the place where he might have been honored and happy, with a feeling of shame and discouragement.

It was not a happy home-coming. Even Lily knew, now, that her beloved brother was not as pure and upright as of yore. And he read reproach in the quivering little voice, when she welcomed him.

His mother was as kind as ever. But his father met him with a stern coldness which scarcely warmed into a momentary cordiality. His pride and his affections had been sorely wounded. He could not overlook his son's

grievous offences till the young man earned, in some way, his approval.

Mr. Lawton found writing for him in his office, and watched over him vigilantly. This surveillance was extremely irksome to Harold's proud spirit, but he knew he had deserved it. Occasionally he would elude his father's watchful eye, and seek his old haunts. Then, there would be an added cloud at home; more tears from the mother and Lily, and a heavier shadow upon Mr. Lawton's brow.

The second anniversary of the class graduation came. Allan Grantley, upon joining the army, had delegated his duties as secretary to a distant classmate, who faithfully wrote to every member of the class, and made out the second annual report.

Again, there were changes. Several were married, still others had joined in the great national conflict that absorbed so much of all our interests during that year.

Little Carrie Gleason could send them no word

of remembrance now. She was sleeping — in too secure and beautiful a peace for even the sounds of battle to disturb her — upon a shaded slope within sight of her father's house.

The mother, who wrote in answer to the letter sent her, said:

"She is so near us, that often I leave my sewing or my book and walk through the garden to where she lies. It rests me to go, and to realize that my daughter is done with all the pain and the weariness, and safely housed, so early, in the Father's better home."

With a tender feeling, that no words of his could do justice to that letter, the young man sent a copy of it to every one of them.

Harold Lawton was deeply touched by it. Within the last year he had almost forgotten the old days at school, or remembered them only with a feeling of patronizing superiority.

Upon the reception of a note of inquiry, he made brief reply that he had been in college, but was at home in disgrace.

This rough statement was modified in the report. He saw his own name among the others. He read the pages through, and sighed at their close.

"Am I the only one who is wasting life so wickedly?"

The names of their dead, tenderly mentioned and cherished, ah, how long was the list! And this last one, this recent record! His tears dropped upon it. How transient the impression might have been we cannot say, but it was immediately followed up by another reminder, a very kindly, but decided one, from Margaret Carrington.

"Harold," so the letter commenced, "you may wonder that I am addressing you in this way. But, although two years have passed since I saw you, and we probably now have few interests in common, I cannot forget that you were one of my friends at school, and that I saw in you then the elements of a noble character.

"I have heard about you since; nothing pleasant, as you know.

"Harold, why is this? Why are you proving false to your highest interests; your own better self? I am surprised and grieved at you. But none the less — rather more — I wish to speak to you with all the olden friendliness.

"I want to bid you rouse yourself from this lethargy of folly. For your own sake, Harold Lawton, be a true, honorable man. You can be. It is not too late for reform. Throw aside this past dead year. Trample its bitter memories beneath your feet, and stand erect with the proud determination that henceforth you will make for yourself a noble name.

"I do not wish to think that you are making a failure of life. We all expected great things of you. Are you going to disappoint us?

"You are out of college, I hear. Well, you can learn a great many things without books.

"It would be better to earn your bread with brave, pure hands, and to forget every line of

classic lore, than to traverse the whole field of literature and demonstrate practically — what would it profit whether you read it in Virgil or not? — that the descent to Avernus is easy, aye, terribly easy!

"Find something to do, Harold. Don't let your father's wealth and generous indulgence be a curse to you. Rely upon yourself, Harold; rely upon yourself!

"In days like these, when every true heart and strong arm can find the triumph of noble sacrifice, how dare you squander all your privileges, and go on from one idle, useless day to another, a slothful cumberer of the ground? How dare you?

"I hope you will not be angry with me for my plain speaking. Even if you are, I shall scarcely regret doing what a real friendship for you has prompted.

"A deeper motive, though, has influenced me. I want always to be doing my Master's work. When I think how immeasurably better it is to

be trying to live a pure life, I long to help every one into the true way.

"Once more, Harold, find work to do. It were better for you to go out to the cruel, uncertain conflict that is raging about us, and to lay down life itself for your country, than to wander on in this path you are pursuing. Don't be so foolish, so sinfully blind." This was signed, "MARGARET CARRINGTON."

At first, Harold was angry. He threw the letter into his desk hastily.

"Impertinent!" he muttered, and went on with his writing.

But, somehow, her words haunted him. He recalled, all through the day, incidents of the old school-life that seemed to belong so entirely to another portion of his history.

Walking down street that night he met two or three young ladies whom he knew. They met him, one without the least sign of recognition, the others with cool, careless nods.

The contrast struck him strongly. How like Margaret Carrington it was to remember him all the more in his disgrace! That evening he read the letter again.

"She has requested no answer," he said, as he finished reading. "She prefers deeds to words. Oh, if I could have strength enough to be a man!"

For two weeks he continued in his father's office, working faithfully, and showing in many ways that he wished to regain some of his lost self-respect.

Mr. Lawton began to think tremblingly of the possibility of his son's reforming.

One morning Harold detained his father a moment as he was leaving the house.

"Can I see you a little while in the library, father?"

He looked into his face with a frank expression.

"Certainly, my son."

He led the way across the hall.

"You'll be surprised, father," the young man began, "to hear what I am going to say, but don't condemn my suggestion till you have thought about it. I can't do much better here, I am afraid. I've fallen low enough to feel all the heavy weight of disgrace upon me. This sort of life isn't worth anything. I want to do better, or die. Father — now don't discourage me — I want to enlist in the regiment now being filled here."

"This is a sudden resolve, is it not, Harold?"

"Somewhat so. I've been thinking it over for two weeks or so. I feel that perhaps I can save myself by going. At all events, I can at least die trying to do my duty."

His father answered him kindly after a brief silence.

"My boy" — all the old, fond tone was in his voice — "I will not put the least hindrance in your way. If you wish to serve your country, I cannot say you nay."

"Then I have your consent."

"Yes. And my *best* wishes."

"May I ask you to tell mother and Lily?"

"Yes. I will make it as smooth as possible for you. But, Harold, if you go away into such danger and, amid the evil companions you may find, slide again into reckless sin, it will almost kill your mother."

He did not add, "and myself," but Harold knew that his father's happiness was bound up in his children.

Mrs. Lawton was very willing to send her son into the dangers of the combat. Tender as was her motherly heart, it was yet strong to endure; and she felt that it was better for him to go—to make this last effort to save himself in risking his life for his country.

Just before his regiment started for Washington, he penned a few lines to Margaret Carrington. He tried to tell her the new strength her brave, helping words had given him, but it was no use; he couldn't half express his thankfulness, and closed abruptly

with a "God bless you!" that came straight from his heart.

And so he was gone. Those who love him must wait for time to attest whether this last trial would prove a failure.

Ever and anon they saw the name of his company among those who were where the fighting waged fiercest. And for days after such news there would seem an oppression in the air, as if they could not breathe freely.

His letters always cheered them. He solemnly assured his parents that he was abstaining entirely from all intoxicating drinks, and once, in a little note to his mother, he said: "God willing, mother mine, I'll be a man you shall be proud of yet." How she treasured the words!

Once during that autumn it was Harold's good fortune to clasp the friendly hand of Allan Grantley. It was by accident that they met, and only for a few moments, as Allan's company were making ready to march

from the place where they had been encamped.

"Why, old fellow! you here? That's a surprise." Each looked eagerly in the other's face.

Allan's was sun-browned and a little care-worn, but his own sunny smile broke out in all its remembered brightness. Harold could look at him frankly now. He felt that *he*, too, was striving to be noble and true. Further than this he did not reason, or pause to analyze the faith that shut out all fear from Allan's horizon and kept him so calm even when the danger was most imminent.

Three days later, among the list of killed and wounded in a recent engagement, he saw these words: "Captain Grantley, severely wounded." He took the paper in his hand and walked away from the tent. He did not wish for careless strangers to see the quick, hot tears he could not hide.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WINTER.

I MUST not attempt, within the brief limits of my story, to follow out minutely all the windings of the several lives to which I have called your attention. We are trying to watch their varying courses during three trial years — years that tested them all; that brought out many noble qualities, and in many cases revealed sinful wanderings.

Now we find ourselves entering upon the third. That winter — eventful as it doubtless was in its own way to every one of them — contained few incidents which we can particularly note.

Occasional stray gleanings from the journals they all kept, must suffice for this period of time.

Bertie wrote under date of December thirty-first, as follows:

"The last day of the year! I want to make some special record of my thought, that I may keep it for remembrance next December.

"It has been such a beautiful year! It seems now, looking back upon it, that I have been permitted to sing praises and thanksgivings from day to day all the year through. God has been very tender with me. So joyous is my heart that I fear lest I may forget the errors and follies of the year, and imagine myself standing securely even when my feet are stumbling.

"Oh, would that, as this day's sun sinks from sight, my sins committed within the year that is closing, might also vanish forever into nothingness! With Christ's help, the coming year that is so near me, fresh and unsullied in its white, winter purity, shall bear the record of nobler deeds and more unselfish prayers.

"'Count that day lost whose low-descending sun
Sees from thy hand no worthy action done.'

"But other words I have, more beautiful still, and I mean to inscribe them on my heart as the truest motto for the year.

"'*Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*'"

Again, under date of January twenty-fourth:

"Papa has just been home, telling me that uncle Hervey's case has been decided against him, and that now he and aunt Sarah, old and childless as they are, must be thrown, homeless and poor, upon the world.

"'If it were not for your happiness, Bertie, I know what I should do. I should offer them a home here. Uncle Hervey was kind as any father to me years ago, when I most needed kindness.' The tears in his eyes brought it all back to my mind — the old story they used to tell me in my childhood, of the fearful fall that killed my grandfather, and his being brought home dead, when papa was but a

boy. I can understand what he means by that —'when I most needed kindness.'

"My answer came, I trust, very promptly. 'Why, papa, it would make me happy to have them come. You don't have much faith in me, I am afraid.'

"'But, my daughter, they are old people. Your aunt has seen a great deal of trouble and sickness; and, being naturally rather a nervous, high-tempered woman, she has grown irritable. She might annoy you in a thousand ways.'

"That doesn't signify. You said that you wished them to come, and so, just as strongly, do I. To tell the truth, I don't have a single thing to trouble me. No doubt I need the discipline. Now, papa, just write them to come, and emphasize your invitation by a very decided 'Bertie also wishes it.' He went out, looking happy and relieved. Of course, I want them to come. It will give me some unselfish work to do, and I *will* try to make them happy."

"*March 2nd* — EVENING. I am a little tired to-night, for it has been one of aunt Sarah's feeble days, and she has seemed to prefer my attendance to that of Mary Rogers, who, nevertheless, knows twice as much about sickness as I do. I wonder if auntie is really getting to love me a little.

"I pity her, she is so ill and sorrowful. All the good things of this life seem to have eluded her grasp for so long, that now she counts everything ill.

"Uncle Henry is less despondent, and interests himself so much with books and papers and his long, daily walks, that I feel less anxiety for his happiness.

"Auntie, somehow, is so petulant, and she takes so much of my time that — there! what am I doing? Whining at the one little sacrifice I am called upon to make! Grudging service is no service at all, I must remember. '*The Lord loveth a cheerful giver.*'

"Auntie's bell again! I am going to take my

little Bible with me. Perhaps she will like me to read from it."

"*March 3d.*" — The hand trembles here, as if from weariness. — "Aunt Sarah has had a bad headache to-day, but is much better now. I read to her the beautiful chapter about Christ's opening the eyes of the blind man. I think it pleased her, for she kissed me good-night when I left her.

> 'The trivial round, the common task,
> Will furnish all we ought to ask;
> Room to deny ourselves, a road
> To lead us daily nearer God.'"

. . . . . .

Margaret upon her birthday chronicled the duties and pleasures of her daily life.

"*December 25th.* — Years ago, when I was a tiny child sitting by my mother during the winter's evening while she rocked baby Nettie in the cradle, she told me how happy it always made her that my birthday came on Christmas.

"'A gift from God, we called you Margaret,

when we first looked upon your face.' These were her words. Twenty-one years ago to-day she called me so — God's gift to her young, loving heart.

"The baby she kissed that morning has grown a woman now; and mother, my precious mother, spends her Christmas with the angels who sang their '*Glory in the highest*,' upon His earthly birth-morn.

"My first Christmas without her! It has been hard to be cheerful during this day. Somehow the wreaths in the windows, the holly and the ivy, the clustering red berries that Nettie has arranged so fancifully, have a lonely look.

"The tears would come this morning when papa, with such solemn tenderness, gave me my birthday kiss and Christmas greeting. Their beautiful gifts — his and Nettie's! I am glad they were not by to see me cry over them.

"I have succeeded in being bright and talkative thus far; and papa smiled, like himself,

sometimes, when I was reading Dickens' *Christmas Carol* after dinner.

"He said to me to-night, 'You are a great comfort to me, Margaret, daughter.' Such words as these will repay me for any efforts I may have made to cheer him. And now that he is chatting busily with Dr. Granger, and Nettie is deeply interested in her book, I can spend a few minutes in 'talking to myself.'

"What a very quiet sort of life mine has grown! And yet, simple and almost monotonous as are its duties, I never was less discontented. Is it treachery to her dear memory to say 'I never was happier?'

"I used to think it a mere figure of speech when believers said that Christ was dearer to them than any earthly friend. Now, I can comprehend it. The void in my heart that was so fathomless has been filled with his tender love. And, though there is always a sense of loss, humanly speaking, there has been an in-

finite gain. I find pleasure in living faithfully through these uneventful days.

"Nettie is giving her attention more than ever to her books and music. She is a great comfort to me, this bright-faced little sister. She is always so cheery that her nightly home-coming, when her classes are done, is like a sudden flash of sunlight, or a warm little Southern breeze.

"I find work enough to keep me very busy. Mornings I attend to the parlors and library, and give directions for the day. Then, of late, I am taking charge of my own and Nettie's clothing, which taxes my inexperience.

"My own reading and studying I am resolved not to neglect; and by economizing my time a little I manage to find leisure for it. Music is one of papa's greatest home-comforts, so I make it a part of my duty to play and sing for him. On this, my birthday evening, I am going to sing the *Gloria in Excelsis*, which he so loves to hear.

"It is only a very simple record I am making. I almost smile, looking it over. It seems so different from the old dreams that I cherished. But, thank God, I have got the Day-star in my pictures now, and they have lost the old dreary shadings."

. . . . . .

From Louise's diary I have taken these two extracts. The one what she thought with reference to her work as a teacher, the other a rapid sketch of her new happiness.

"What a stormy Friday it has been! I have seldom known our number at school to be so small. I am, consequently, far less tired than usual to-night; yet, after all, I like the busy days best. I can hardly realize that the year is so nearly ended; the school year, I mean. I suppose when I see 'January seven' at the top of my page, I should rather be talking about the year's beginning.

"And in so few weeks I am going home, after spending two years here as a teacher.

"The trustees desire me to return, but I have declined. I think next year I shall remain at home and devote my time to giving music lessons. I am a little worn now, and I think a change of work would be beneficial.

"I am glad of the experience of these two years. I am, and always shall be, the happier for the many new friends I have found. And my life will be none the poorer for the interest I have taken in my scholars. I wonder if all teachers love their scholars as much as I do some of mine. They have been with me so constantly, I feel that, almost insensibly, they have grown very dear to me. Some of the faces I have seen from day to day during these past years will be among the pleasantest pictures my memory holds. Some names, hear them how or where I may in the future, will seem always like the echoes of tenderly-remembered days.

"And now, so soon, I am to go from them, and another will take my place. May

she be loving and faithful. I wonder if she will care for them as I have done. I wonder — it makes me a little sad, too — if they will speedily learn to forget me. Perhaps so. They are young and impressible. It may be, that in all the hurry and happiness of youth, thoughts of me will be very rare and careless. But perhaps, years from now, when these boys and girls have grown to manhood and womanhood, I may meet them in many a walk of life.

"If then, renewing our acquaintance, they can refer with dim but pleasant memory to the past, and there find a record which has not been fruitless of gentle aid and true example, I shall be content.

"The work, just as it is, I must lay down at the Master's feet, praying Him to bless and render fruitful what has been done aright, and to cover with his own mantle of charity, all its faults and failures.

"HOME, *March 29th.* — How like a dream my

present seems! Can it be a reality, this new warm love that so enfolds me in its tenderness? What am I, to merit such a blessing? I thought of it as I stood before the mirror this morning. What was there in my face, or voice, or manners, to attract such a man as Arthur Brookes? And he says he loves me for my goodness, and honors me. He, too, stoops from his own place to *honor* poor little me!

"I just hold my breath, sometimes, before this great happiness. It is too strange and new, as yet, to be altogether peaceful. After a little, I shall learn to rest in it, and be grateful for the blessing.

"I must write to Margaret and Bertie. I know they will both rejoice in my joy. Tender-hearted little Bertie has given me a great deal of sympathy in my hard work. Margaret has, too, but her condolence is always as bracing as a tonic.

"'It'll do you good, Lou.' How many times

she has written that! How I wish I could see her dear face! Only a little more than three months before I shall, and my hard work will be over. Indeed, I never stopped to think how hard it was till now I know, from the sense of rest I feel, that it did weigh upon me.

"I shall grow very indolent, I am afraid, now that I find the need of exertion gone. But, if I am thankfully happy, and happily thankful — the girls would smile at that — I shall hope to be kept from any grievous lapse."

. . . . . .

Harold Lawton, little accustomed to journalizing, made but the briefest daily notes. Sometimes, after exposure to danger and death, we find a few strong words, expressive of gratitude for his safety, perhaps of grief, at the loss of some valued comrade.

Every allusion to his parents and little sister showed that the old strong love for them had regained its place in his heart.

Of himself he said little. But in one place I find a few lines, written, it would seem, just after receiving a letter from his mother.

"It fills me with amazement when I think about my headlong folly during the last two years. Why was I so insane and wicked!

"It makes me shudder, even now, to think of Stanton and Bradley; they were the first who led me into evil.

"I wondered, when I read the other night that Stanton had lost his right arm in battle, whether the affliction might not do him good. I wish it might. Perhaps, years ago, some one tempted him, just as he afterwards tempted me. He may yet reform.

"For myself, I must try to make up lost time. No, mother, do not fear lest I should fall again. I have tasted such degradation once for all. You shall shed no more tears over your boy's disgrace. I can say in all sincerity that no soldier of them all is freer from vice; that none can show a clearer record.

"I needed to see the *reality* of life; to have a cause worthy all my strength to help sustain, and it has saved me."

. . . . . .

Allan Grantley was at home for three months, suffering from wounds. "The gallant young captain," as the papers called him, had plunged into the thickest of the fight, encouraging his soldiers to go where there was need of bravest struggle; and, though he was borne faint and bleeding from the field, he had the joy of hearing the victorious shouts of the Union troops.

He was very patient during his compulsory furlough. And his mother, thankful always that this illness was not "unto death," prized every moment that she could have him at home.

During these quiet weeks he had leisure for a great deal of thought, and some memories, which perhaps had been steadily repressed during his stronger days.

Sometimes he would pencil a few lines, indi-

cative of a certain uneasiness which no one save himself ever guessed.

One day he had been spending an hour in looking over old school programmes and essays. A tiny note fluttered out from the midst of the papers. He knew every word that it contained — just a request to meet the committee in the lecture room, to decide on a class motto — but he opened it, and looked a long time at its contents. It was in Bertie Arnold's handwriting. A faint perfume still clung about the paper; the delicious violet perfume that she always used.

That night his fancies found expression on paper.

"Were I a rich man, had I even a home to offer her, I should tell her the truth. She doesn't know it, the gentle-faced little creature! but even back in the old school-days I loved her. And now — well, I am older, that is all. My caring is for once and always.

"It has been so long since I saw her! It

may be she has quite forgotten me, and yet I hope not.

"Bertie, Bertie — I dare to write it here where no one else will see — how dear you are to me! The future is uncertain. My country has need of me now. I must not darken your calm happiness by a word of the love that could offer you no fair exchange for what it would ask.

"The fearful battle-clouds rise darkly between the present and that rapidly nearing re-union. I have seen so much of death that I count less surely upon the future.

"I may not be there to see you, little Bertie, and yet I have dreamed of it so often! But whether we meet again or not, may God's tender love guide and keep thee. May his rich blessings be abundantly thine. And though my love bring me naught but pain, I cannot murmur, since, through these years, it has been like a gentle, brooding dove in my heart. I have tried to keep the shrine pure for it. Surely no thought

of ill should find a resting-place where thou wert cherished."

. . . . . .

Perhaps from such words as these, you will gain some idea of what this winter brought to each of them.

They were walking in widely different paths, but God's love is broad as the universe, and these young lives were, every one of them, tenderly held therein.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BEAUTIFUL FACE.

MAY-FLOWERS! How lovely! Margaret thought, as, standing by the window in the spring morning, she saw a little boy go by with his fragrant burden. It was early for them to be found, and she wondered where the child had been in quest of them. He walked along very sedately, a grave expression upon his face, guarding his basket of blossoms carefully against any chance crowding of the passers-by.

It went out of Margaret's mind, save to mention to Nettie at the dinner-table that the trailing arbutus was in bloom, and she would like to find some.

That afternoon she went out for a walk.

It was a fancy of hers to take long, solitary walks, and this day was so full of the inspiriting freshness of the spring, that her step was elastic and her eye bright.

She walked on until she found herself in the vicinity of that humble house of worship that had witnessed one of the fiercest conflicts of her life. Impelled by a strong feeling of interest, she turned into the narrow street and went down toward the church. Reaching it, she noticed, to her surprise, that the doors were open, and people were going in. She looked at her watch. It was three o'clock. She decided quickly that she had leisure to join them, and passed in with the others, wondering a little that they were having a week-day service.

As she walked down the aisle she saw, with a strange thrill of feeling, that a coffined form was lying before the altar.

She wondered who of those she had seen there once before was to be borne hence to their

quiet resting-place. It was evident that the grief touched very many of those present. She saw — yes, she was sure of it — the same child who had passed her window in the morning, sitting near the front row of seats, his lips quivering, and the slow tears falling now and then, despite his utmost endeavors to the contrary.

Again, Margaret had a sudden, pained sense of being a stranger among them, but this time came a quick thought of comfort. She was no stranger to the Lord who met them here. She, who had walked through the valley of desolation, could "weep with those who wept." She could mingle her prayers, too, with theirs.

She noticed how the minister's voice faltered in the opening prayer. It was plain that his heart was very heavy at this death.

She wished, while they were singing, that she could catch a glimpse of that face in the coffin. It seemed to be literally surrounded by flowers. How little she had dreamed that the pink-tinged

blossoms which had gladdened her sight that morning were consecrated to the dead.

The hymn was ended, the minister arose to speak to his people of the one who had gone. Very slowly he read the Scripture, "*When this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*"

For a moment he was silent, looking down thoughtfully upon the face which Margaret could not see. She noticed that many were weeping.

Then he went on to speak of the departed; of her faith, her goodness, her beautiful christian life. "A young girl," Margaret repeated to herself; "perhaps as young as I am." With a sudden flash of remembrance it all came to her. She felt sure that she had seen that face upon that night when the joy-flush illumined it.

The speaker alluded in touching terms to this young girl's orphanage; her homeless life,

save, as he quietly added, for the home we all gave her in our hearts. He spoke of her earnest, sympathetic way of doing good; of her love for little children — here the boy whom Margaret had seen, hid his face — of her reverence for the aged. He dwelt with tender sympathy upon the slow, wearing agony of her life. His voice grew stronger as he told of her triumphant departure.

His loving tribute ended, they sang again. Then, e'er the coffin-lid was closed, those who cared to do so, went to look upon the one so soon to be carried from their midst.

Margaret followed the others. It was as she had felt. The same face, only a little thinner and paler than she had seen it, utterly peaceful, with the flowers about it.

Her white hands were clasped, holding a few tiny buds; the closed lids hiding the strangely beautiful eyes.

Margaret pondered wistfully. What wonderful glories that soul had seen! Whether any-

thing, even in the heaven where she would feel health and strength, could be better to her than the vision that those eyes reflected when she caught the Saviour's voice of love.

With instinctive reverence she put her hand on the white forehead, then left the little room, moving with hushed step past that little company of mourners, and carrying out with her a consciousness of having been in a holy place.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROPHECY DEFEATED.

MAY had come in that eventful year of 1865, when the joy-bells rung out the story of our great, decisive triumph; when all hearts were lightened and all faces radiant with relief at the new peace of the Nation.

There were hushes even amidst our jubilant thanksgiving. The many fresh graves that marked as many heart-wounds were before our eyes; quiet reminders of the great price which had been paid.

The memory of him who had been taken away in that first flush of thankfulness — our martyred Lincoln — was tenderly and tearfully cherished. Such sacred pain, mingling with the joy, gave it a tinge of sadness. But the

relief and happiness were uppermost. The absent dear ones whom the fires of the war had not destroyed were to return soon to their homes.

Very few among us all but were thinking with quicker heart-beats of some near and tender welcome.

"It is beautiful," Louise Carrol said softly to her mother, as they sat at their sewing in the little morning-room. "It is very beautiful to me to think that my marriage is to take place now, just in the first gladness of our victory. Somehow, it wouldn't have seemed quite fitting before." Now, aside from the bloom and the beauty, there is a deeper sense of happiness. I do not feel that it is thankless for me to pause from all work for the present and accept this great blessing."

Mrs. Carrol looked at her a moment in tender motherly thoughtfulness. She made a pleasant picture, leaning back in her low sewing-chair, the dainty ruffling she was hemming just

fallen from the slender fingers that were clasped loosely as she spoke.

The rest of home — perchance this crowning happiness of her young life — had brought back the old flush to her cheeks, and the merriment to her eyes. With it all, the new look of earnestness remained.

"I can trust you, my darling," was the mother's unspoken thought.

"It seems strange to me," Louise went on musingly, "when I think of being taken right away from worriments and anxieties about the daily furnishings of life. That is one of the good things that has come to me — the ease and plenty that will be mine. I smile to myself when Mr. Brookes chides me for my small economies, or tells me they will be needless henceforth. Somehow all this planning and saving and working has grown dear to me."

Then she laughed merrily.

"Oh, I remember when we were at school,

one of the girls wrote a composition, and took for the title this line:

"'The sweetest butter comes from the milk we have churned.'

"When Mrs. Niles looked at it, she straightway changed it to —

"'The results we most prize, come from our own work.'

"Hattie didn't like it, and clung to her first choice, though we all told her it savored too much of the dairy to be quite classical. But I always remembered it, and now I can understand something about it.

"My carefully kept dresses, and old-styled cloaks, the few books I used to buy at the close of every term, and especially the money I saved for Bessie's schooling, were some of *my* churning.'"

"And now your generous friend declares he shall take charge of her education himself. He told her father last night that she ought to go away again, next term, and begged the

privilege — those were his words — of defraying her expenses for the rest of her course."

"I knew he intended telling papa so;" her brown eyes were moist. "So my poor little helping won't be the real thing, after all."

"I think your 'poor little helping' has been one of the best things, daughter. This is your helping none the less that it comes from his hands. Your father was speaking about it last night."

"About what, mother?"

"You, dear, to be candid. And we both decided — I will tell you, because I think you deserve it at the close of your hard years of effort — that you would be safe in your prosperity. You have borne the toil nobly, and now God is giving you a beautiful recompense of happiness. We are so glad for you, darling — your father and I.

"Not solely, or most, for the wealth and luxury that await you, but because you love him whom you have chosen, and because you

both love the Saviour. Your home will be blessed; not for its wealth and elegance, but because it will be consecrated to Christ."

After that they were very quiet for a little while, the breeze coming softly into the room, lifting the curtains, and blowing Louise's dark hair into little stray waves upon her forehead. Such tender talks and even tenderer silences had become very frequent between the mother and daughter. Both felt more than they said. But both understood a great deal that remained unspoken.

Louise was to be married upon the twenty-fourth. Only a few days remained of her girlhood home life. Those days, shaded occasionally by little sadly pleasant memories, just as you have seen the sun obscured by light, passing clouds, were, for the most part, very happy.

To Bessie, it was simply delightful. She enjoyed Mr. Brookes' frequent comings, and chivalrous, elder-brotherly kindness to herself. The slight stir, and, to her eyes, unwonted magnifi-

cence of Louise's preparations, seemed to invest the house with new dignity and importance.

The trunks which were waiting, some almost packed, for the bridal journey, seemed tangible hints of the delightful wanderings which would suffer no limitations except their wishes.

Then, too, her own departure for school was near at hand. And, so quiet had been Bessie's life, she looked forward to her new prospects with fluttering heart.

"Your prediction is to be falsified, Margaret," Louise wrote about this time in one of her letters. "I shall be unable to say 'Louise Carrol, aged forty-five,' as you so flatteringly foretold. But, despite that humiliating mistake, may I ask your good wishes, perhaps a few little tender thoughts, and a murmured 'God bless you!' when you think of my bridal."

. . . . . .

The morning of the twenty-fourth was beautifully bright and peaceful.

It was a very quiet wedding. Bessie had

adorned the simple rooms with flowers; and the light coming in in little quivering rays through the half-closed blinds, was just faint enough to accord with the deep, quiet joy of the occasion.

In the presence of a few chosen friends, Louise stood amid the flowers, and the sifting sun-rays, and spoke her marriage vows.

Her face was earnest with new meanings. If one-half of the unuttered hopes, the tender, joyous heart-prophecies that unconsciously revealed themselves, were realized, surely she would be thrice blest.

The hand that clasped hers was strong and true. The eyes that were bent upon her with rare, deep affection, never shrank from looking with royal, steadfast honesty upon the world.

The true heart which would be her refuge in all the after storms of life, had enshrined her as its dearest earthly treasure. The lips that had uttered to her words of affection, had said — as if even in this happiness the speaker

did not forget to whom he owed it — "If God spares us to each other, darling, we shall be very happy. We must not forget to ask his blessing upon our love."

The brief service was over; the girlish home-life ended; the familiar name even changed. And this step which she had taken was for no transient experiment. Only death could sever the bond between them.

Ah! at the bridal, how seldom do we pause to think of the significance of that solemn "Until death —"

But happy the wedded life which begins amid the prayers of parents and friends, and the deeper, more soul-felt thanksgiving of the two hearts which are thus bound by a life-long tie.

Bessie wondered a little, when, kissing her sister, and greeting her by the new name, the cheek that pressed her own left a hot tear upon her face. The mother comprehended better. She knew that some joys, from their

very depth, occasion pain. And she saw that her child's heart was full.

A month later, up among the hills of New Hampshire, in a quiet little town where they chanced to rest for a day, after much car-riding, the husband and wife sat together talking of the pleasant weeks since they began their journey.

"And now it is almost ended," Louise said at last, half-regretfully.

"Almost ended, and yet, but just begun. This little happy rest may seem to us sometime, darling, like the refreshing sunrise hour before the day's heat and weariness." Her eyes met his questioningly. "Do not be frightened. I didn't mean to speak too seriously. But we have been so happy! Perhaps we ought not to expect the untried *always*, that you speak of so often, to be just like these last pleasant *yesterdays*."

"Not in all respects. But the same in two things, I trust, even till we go down the

sunset slope of life — our love for each other and our constant faith in God."

"I wished, a little sadly, that the flowers in the vases, upon that morning we were married, wouldn't wither. I did not like to think that change and decay could come so soon into the beautiful freshness of our surroundings."

"I took a tiny spray of flowers, Louise, for remembrance. And sometime, perhaps, we may look at it together, and rejoice that, though it has grown scentless and faded, the love which it memorizes has but waxed stronger, and its tender mystery freshened with the years that have been powerless to change."

How near them seemed the beautiful blue sky! In the light of their happiness that day, the joys beyond became almost intelligible.

"Our life is all before us, dear one," Mr. Brookes went on; "our lovely, united life. I do not tremble in presence of my great happiness, but I find my prayers are more heartfelt and earnest.

"Of late, I have felt sometimes that I understood" — he paused, and spoke next in a very quiet tone — "something about what the apostle meant when he spoke of the great mystery of such love, and declared it to be sacred like the tie between Christ and his earthly Church."

Louise did not answer. It was seldom that her grave, quiet husband gave utterance to his deepest feelings. When he did, she saw depths in his nature that gave her a sense of rest and strength. Now, she could not have put her thought into words, but it was something like this:

"If ever, in that distant, unknown future, she should be sitting alone — white-haired, it might be, and feeble with the burden of the years — could even time or grief, or the grave which might be her remembrance, blot from her memory the words that had joined their love to the hereafter?"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REUNION.

AGAIN the July sun glowed warmly through the tall, clustering trees in dear old Merrivale. Again, after three years of absence, three familiar girlish figures stand in "Margaret's room," looking out toward the changeless, well-remembered mountains. The long-anticipated day of reunion had arrived.

From widely scattered homes, from the recent peril and triumph of the war, from pleasant rest, or honorable work, the class had come to this mutual, happy commemoration.

Changed themselves, hurrying on despite, it may be, a few quiet sighs for passing youth, to the realities of their maturer life, it was restful to them all to find the old school-home

unchanged. How lightly all the storms had touched the place! How entirely the same seemed the buildings, the streets, the very gardens before the houses.

The familiar faces of the teachers, too, kept wondrously fresh in this life that drew them always so close to youth.

Professor Lindsay greeted the returned "children" with almost fatherly warmth. His quick, inquiring gaze read every face; saw from the new lines in each whether the three years' history had been of triumph or failure.

Mrs. Howard welcomed the girls affectionately. "No birds in these cages, since you went away, have filled your places," she said, with something between a smile and a tear.

"Why, Mrs. Howard" — Louise turned from the window and kissed her again — "do you remember my nonsense so well as that? There's fidelity for you!" Again in the atmosphere of the pleasant old school-life Louise was just her former self. She sparkled; she fairly bewitched

them all into hilarity, and quite astonished dignified Mr. Brookes, who was endeavoring to make acquaintance with her friends, by her comical tricks of speech and snatches of merry song, enigmatical to him, but full of meaning to her fellow-students.

Mr. Brookes was greatly pleased with Margaret Carrington. "A face full of meanings," he whispered to his wife at first seeing her. There was a little tone of triumph in Louise's voice as she told her friend's name, for she had never been able to awaken much enthusiasm when she had tried to describe Margaret's characteristic attractions. Very possibly he might not have admired the girl of her remembrance; but the impetuous, undisciplined nature had become a chastened, gentle-hearted woman. She stood among the others, no longer haughtily distant, save to a chosen few, but gentle, affectionate — a queen still, by her royal gifts of heart and brain.

"Three whole years, Maggie," Louise mur-

mured. And Margaret answered, something in her eyes bringing to Louise's mind the quick thought that now her friend was motherless, "Yes, three years, dear."

Bertie, with curls grown long again, and pink-tinted cheeks, welcomed one and another of her friends with the same gentle grace as of old.

Gracie Rogers — Gracie Rogers no longer, but Mrs. Dr. Holcomb — was a little dignified and patronizing, perhaps, but thoroughly affectionate still. Her husband, owing to pressing business engagements, could not come.

Once, within the first hour after their arrival, Mrs. Howard broke down and cried heartily. She had come into the room with something carried very carefully in her hand.

A long, golden-brown curl, a tiny slip of primrose paper caught in it, bearing a name and the two little words, "*Don't forget!*" They needed not to read the name. Then came to them all a vision of the childish face with its

crown of curls; the little graceful figure that had been in their midst when they were last assembled there.

Margaret, especially, who had loved and petted winsome little Carrie Gleason, thought to herself how many times that very curl, perhaps, had fallen upon her own shoulder as she had held the tiny little creature in her arms.

Ah, truly —

> "Nothing so consecrates a name
> As to be written dead!"

It was hard to break the silence that fell upon them all. It was Bertie's voice that spoke first in the words of that old sacred question and reply:

"'*And he said unto her: Is it well with the child? And she answered: It is well.*'"

All the exercises of the day were fraught with deepest interest.

The dinner in the long hall, when Allan Grantley — "master of ceremonies," as Louise

whispered to Grace Holcomb — counting their number, found that thirty-five out of forty-two were present; the glad welcomes; the old cordiality soon taking the place of the first few moments' shyness; the eager questionings concerning the three years of separations which resulted in the happy discovery that this reunion was really one to them all, made the hours pass all too fleetly.

At first no mention was made of those who were away. But by and by "our dead," as Allan reverently named them, received their unforgetful tribute.

Harold Lawton, his face purified now from every lingering stain of the old degradation, walked out to meet Margaret on the Common, where the classmates were strolling in pleasant little groups, toward sunset.

"May I claim a few moments of your time, Miss Carrington?" he questioned, with a little deprecatory smile toward the young lady with whom she was talking. She turned, and, ac-

cepting his offered arm, they passed down the hill, out upon the Garden road, as students termed it.

At first they talked of the day and the friends they met. But ere long Harold, who was restlessly striking the tall grass by the wayside with a slender reed he had found, broke out abruptly:

"Margaret, I want to thank you. You saved me."

"Did I?"

"It seems so to me, always. Your letter came just when every one else had given me up, and I was feeling myself an abandoned outcast. Your outstretched hand drew me back to hope and life."

"I am *very* glad," she answered simply.

"I knew you would be glad. You have helped me in many ways, one in particular, which will be a blessing to me all my life; you restored my faith in friendship, in goodness, in the world. It had been terribly shat-

tered in those months just before you wrote me. I know — I can see well enough what sort of a woman you are going to make, and I know in the full, beautiful life before you, it will gladden you to remember that you saved me from despair and loss."

"It will, Harold. I thank God that you are striving now to be a worthy man. I wish, however," — her smile took away the hardness of the words—"that your reform was based upon something *real*. The gain you have made is of unspeakable value, but there is something better still."

Harold listened respectfully. This faith was very precious to her, he knew from her voice and expression. But he had not gained the knowledge that could make it plain to him.

Margaret had the tact to stop when she had said enough. She changed the conversation now, and they returned to indifferent topics. But the few words that had been spoken would lodge in the young man's mind.

They rejoined their companions upon the Common just in time to hear Louise's eager voice.

"Oh, yes," she was saying. "We can all sing. It will be so pleasant to have music out here."

They all joined in the familiar class ode. Their voices rung out full and strong in the fresh air, beneath the arching trees. The green branches took up the echoes, adding thereto mystic whisperings of their own; and the waves of song went upward, many a raised glance and lifted thought following them.

At last, when the twilight deepened, and the evening dews began to fall, some one suggested going in.

"Let's sing *once* more," pleaded many voices.

And Bertie, who was usually slow to make suggestions, spoke eagerly: "We all know *Naomi*. Can't we sing that?"

Some one commenced the hymn, and they all joined in the beautiful words:

"Father, whate'er of earthly bliss —"

Harold noticed then, and remembered long after, the light upon the two faces nearest him — Bertie's and Margaret's. The "calm and thankful heart" found visible expression in Bertie's sweet face. And Margaret's eyes, lustrous and peaceful, told that that "Presence" shone even then upon her way.

"Are you making many plans for next year, Hal?"

Allan's voice startled him from his reverie, as, taking his arm, he drew him toward the house.

"Not many. But one, certainly. I am going back to college, and I'm going to do my duty there. You know I lost one year."

Allan pressed his arm more firmly.

"I know you treated me shamefully, old fellow. Don't ever neglect me so again. If you do, I'll —"

"What, Al?" after a slight pause.

"Care just as much for you as ever, and

feel hurt at your silence. I might as well adhere to the truth."

"You've been a faithful friend to me, Allan. You shall have no occasion to feel sorry for me again. And now for yourself. What are your plans?"

Allan took a letter from his pocket, and handed it to him.

"I brought it here to-day on purpose to show it to you. I knew you would understand my thankfulness."

It was a long letter from Allan's uncle George, whose only son had just died of consumption. It spoke in touching terms of his loneliness, and begged his nephew to come to his home. He told him that, childless now, he turned to him as the son of his loved brother, and offered him a son's place in his home, his business and his wealth.

"Why, fortune seems to favor you," Harold said merrily as he refolded the letter.

"I didn't realize how much good this letter

did me till to-day," Allan began impulsively, as he noticed a flutter of white muslin upon the balcony at Mrs. Howard's. Then, checking himself as quickly, he went on to explain the nature of his uncle's business, and the arrangements he was making to remove with his mother to the city.

"It isn't quite my first dream, Harold. I wanted to be a minister, you know. That was my greatest wish, but God seemed to settle that question for me. I could have got along in some way, so far as the lack of money went. But when physicians told me that my throat was too weak to allow of my ever being a public speaker, I gave up all thought of that."

"It was a hard trial for you. I remember it," said Harold pityingly.

"Yes. Then you remember the book Professor Lindsay loaned me of Bushnell's? I found what I wanted there. How often since I have said these lines to quiet all misgivings."

"'God has a definite life-plan for every human person, girding him, visibly or invisibly, for some exact thing, which it will be the true significance and glory of his life to have accomplished. The commonest offices are to become the necessary first chapter of a great and noble history.'

"I am not going to murmur that my own plan was thwarted. I am going to walk trustingly in the way He has marked out for me."

. . . . . .

"Margaret," said Bertie that night after they had gone to their chamber, "what do you think of Louise's husband?"

"I *like* him, thoroughly."

"So do I. She seems very happy."

"Yes. It does me good to watch her. She will make a very beautiful woman, I think."

"I like to watch them all," Bertie answered. "I find myself just as fond of my old schoolmates as ever. No other girls have ever taken their places."

"Thank you, for my share of that."

They didn't talk much after that. It had been an exciting day, and Margaret was weary. She fell asleep soon, but Bertie was awake for an hour dreaming.

The next day it was decided unanimously to remain till the next. Some of the young gentlemen suggested a ride, and, at Margaret's desire, they took the old familiar road where we once followed them during their coach ride.

Allan and Harold, with Margaret and Bertie, were in the same carriage.

"O Allan!" Margaret exclaimed, "do you remember" — as they neared the village — "the little boy we saw that day? The one you took such an interest in?"

"Well, I rather guess I *do*. He is one of my particular friends." Then followed numerous questions.

"Well," Allan began, after there was a lull in the questions, "if you will let me speak, I'll tell you all about it.

"It wasn't a week after I got home before I received a very prettily written note of thanks from the mother of our little Henry. I will say here that she is a very superior woman indeed.

"Not long after, the boy himself wrote to me. And I, pleased that he remembered, answered promptly. Our help was timely, I judged from what Mrs. Davis wrote me. She spoke of a brother she had wished to find in another State, but poverty had prevented her. The money we gave Henry, added to her own slender store, enabled her to go. And I received an account of the visit in the boy's own graphic language.

"This brother, it seems, had never quite forgiven her the marriage which had sorely tried the pride of her family, and for several years there had been no communication between them. He was still unmarried, wealthy and eccentric, and it seemed wrong that his only sister should be suffering for the common comforts of life,

while he gave his wealth by hundreds and thousands to the needy.

"Well, they found him after a little difficulty, and his heart could not withstand the appeal their pitiful appearance made. After a few days he seemed as fond of his sister as ever. And as to the child, he discovered in him — as I did — the germs of unusual power.

"He took them to his home, and for the last three years, nearly, little Henry has had every advantage of wealth and education. But I think he keeps just the same good heart as ever, and his letters show rapid improvement as a scholar. I never think of the child without my heart warming."

The pleasant day ended at length. On the morrow they separated again, and the reunion was a thing of the past.

CHAPTER XXII.

LAST GLIMPSES.

AND now our mutual way ends. Ere I say a word of good-by to the readers whose interest has followed mine through these pages, I will give a few stray hints of the future which lay broad and fair before these young voyagers upon the sea of life.

My first picture shall be of a beautiful home upon the Hudson — a vine-embowered cottage, showing cool as a white lily from its green surroundings upon the June day when I saw it.

Upon the shaded porch sat a fair young mother, her brown eyes full of happy light, her watchful hand guarding the movements of the crowing baby who was just trying to steady himself upon his tiny feet.

"Willie darling, be careful," as he slipped and almost fell. Then, as she saw a well-known figure coming up the walk, Louise — for it was she — took her baby in her arms and hastened to meet her husband. He took the child from her, and together they walked back to the house. The wide-open blue eyes that smiled at first so brightly at "papa," grew drowsy after a little, and the baby was put in his cradle for a quiet nap.

The young mother rejoined her husband. They stood side by side beneath the sheltering vines that climbed to the top of the piazza. After a little pause, Mr. Brookes spoke.

"Darling, how good God is to us."

Louise, our merry, talkative Louise, didn't speak a word in reply. Stooping down, she picked up a little half-worn shoe that her child had left upon the floor. Her fingers tenderly drew it into shape again, and smoothed the creases upon it.

Her eyes sought her husband's, and as his

arm drew her close, she hid her face upon his shoulder with a sigh of utter content.

. . . . . .

Margaret's room, the quiet room from which, since then, strong words and brave thoughts have come to strengthen and help humanity. Would you like to see her in it for a moment?

It was a very large room, lighted by windows that reached to the floor. The carpet, covered with mosses and berries, always suggested to the mind the music of brooks and of bird-songs.

In the corner was a lounge, looking rather comfortable than elegant. The book-case filled one end of the room.

The writing-desk by the eastern window, with the easy-chair just before it, seemed, after all, to be the place where the occupant of the room left surest traces of herself. Papers were lying loosely upon it. One freshly written page, the ink not yet dry, showed that she had but just left her work.

Upon the walls were pictures enough to

delight the eye and fire the imagination. A beautiful Madonna hanging over the lounge, struck a friend of Margaret's, coming in one day and finding her sleeping upon the lounge, with a quick perception of the similarity in expression between the pictured face upon the wall and the sleeping one, over which it seemed to be keeping guard.

Delicate little paintings, with their dainty frames of velvet and gilt hung here and there, procured, it would seem, from time to time, as pleased Margaret's fancy, and placed wherever she could find room for them; for what with paintings and flowers and an occasional bit of statuary, every niche in the room seemed full.

This room was manifestly a place to enjoy — to *live* in.

Margaret sat in thoughtful attitude, a book in her hand. She was weary with writing, and had taken a few minutes to rest. What book had she chosen for this brief diversion?

She was reading half aloud, though in a mere undertone. These were the words upon which she rested, ere she went back to pen her helping thoughts for the young people for whom she wrote.

"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake."

"And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at his coming."

. . . . . .

Harold Lawton went back to his college with good resolutions that were *kept*.

"Who is that young man?" inquired an elderly gentleman of President Small, upon commencement day several years later, when the class to which Harold belonged was to graduate.

"Which?"

"The one who finished his essay a few moments ago."

"The one whose subject was 'Failures and

Successes'? Oh, that is Lawton, one of the best scholars, in every sense of the word."

So far back, and so nobly retrieved, was that first sad experiment of his, that President Small had well-nigh forgotten it. At all events, he did not mention it.

The gentleman watching Harold a moment, said to his companion: "There's something very striking about that face. I felt sure President Small would tell me something unusual about him."

"What did you expect, father?" questioned the young lady.

"I don't know exactly, dear. I am old now, and given to dreaming about people. But I imagined that young fellow had got up to a plane where he felt safe, and that he would hold on like iron. Yes, Minnie, I fancied he'd been almost shipwrecked."

. . . . . .

I think I can give one hint which will suffice for both Allan and Bertie. Just a

word of a plain gold ring upon Bertie's finger; of frequent closely-written letters that came to her from the city where Allan had gone; of a snatch of a conversation between herself and her father, a year after we last saw her.

"It seems very new, my darling. What can I do without you?"

"Nothing, I guess. We must arrange that. Neither Allan nor I would wish me to be far away from you."

"Well, then, I won't complain. But three months is a very short time! Only I know I am to give my little girl to a noble man, who will be very tender with her. I have no fears for my little Bertie."

Alone in her room that night, Bertie smiled at those last words. "*No fears!*" Ah, that was all her father thought it needful to say! But her young heart was pulsing to what she felt was a joyous certainty. Kneeling, a few moments later in the pale moonlight, she committed herself, her dear ones, and her sweet

coming days to Him in whose care she was not afraid to leave them.

Sweet little Bertie! He has kept you indeed "unspotted from the world."

. . . . . .

And now the time to say good-by has come, dear young friends whose eager faces have bent above these pages.

You have read what my thoughts have been of Bertie, Louise, and Margaret. Shall I tell you now what they are of you, my dear unknown friend?

Your face and name I may never know, but something of the questionings that fill your mind, something of your longings for a nobler living, I think I do know.

The question comes to you to-day as surely as it came to Margaret, "Will ye have this Christ or no?" And as surely you will answer it — not in words, perhaps, but by your life.

I would that the answer might be: "*Yea, Lord, for Thou callest me.*"

714

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